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AN  
EXPOSITION  
OF THE  
OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT:

WHEREIN

EACH CHAPTER IS SUMMED UP IN ITS CONTENTS: THE SACRED TEXT INSERTED AT LARGE  
IN DISTINCT PARAGRAPHS; EACH PARAGRAPH REDUCED TO ITS PROPER  
HEADS: THE SENSE GIVEN, AND LARGELY ILLUSTRATED:

WITH

PRACTICAL REMARKS AND OBSERVATIONS.

BY

MATTHEW HENRY,

LATE MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL,

A NEW EDITION, CAREFULLY REVISED AND CORRECTED.  
IN NINE VOLUMES.

VOL. V.—ISAIAH TO LAMENTATIONS.

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## ORIGINAL PREFACE TO VOL. IV.

THOSE books of scripture<sup>1</sup> are all prophetical, of which here, in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling, we have endeavoured a methodical explication and a practical improvement. I call them *prophetical* because so they are for the main, though we have some histories (here and there brought in for the illustration of the prophecies) and a book of Lamentations. Our Saviour often puts *the Law and the Prophets* for all the Old Testament. The prophets, by waiving the ceremonial precepts, and not insisting on them, but only on the weightier matters of the law, plainly intimated the abolishing of that part of the law of Moses by the gospel; and by their many predictions of Christ, and the kingdom of his grace, they intimated the accomplishing and perfecting of that part of the law of Moses in the gospel. Thus the prophets were the *nexus*—the connecting bond between the law and the gospel, and are therefore fitly placed between them.

These books, being prophetical, are, as such, divine, and of heavenly origin and extraction. We have human laws, human histories, and human poems, as well as divine ones, but we can have no human prophecies. Wise and good men may make prudent conjectures concerning future events (*moral prognostications* we call them); but it is essential to true prophecy that it be of God. The learned Huetius lays this down for one of his axioms, *Omnis prophetica facultas à Deo est*—*The prophetic talent is entirely from God*; and he proves it to be the sense both of Jews and heathen that it is God's prerogative to foresee things to come, and that whoever had such a power had it from God. And therefore the Jews reckon all prophecy to be given by the highest degree of inspiration, except that which was peculiar to Moses. When our Saviour asked the chief priests whether John's baptism were from heaven or of men, they durst not say *Of men*, because the people counted him a prophet, and, if so, then not of men. The Hebrew name for a prophet is נביא—a *speaker*, *preacher*, or *orator*, a messenger, or interpreter, that delivers God's messages to the children of men, as a herald to proclaim war or an ambassador to treat of peace. But then it must be remembered that he was formerly called רמא or רמז, that is, a *seer* (1 Sam. ix. 9); for prophets, with the eyes of their minds, first saw what they were to speak and then spoke what they had seen.

Prophecy, taken strictly, is the foretelling of things to come; and there were those to whom God gave this power, not only that it might be a sign for the confirming of the faith of the church concerning the doctrine preached when the things foretold should be fulfilled, but for warning, instruction, and comfort, in prospect of what they themselves might not live to see accomplished, but which should be fulfilled in its season: so predictions of things to come long after might be of present use.

The learned Dr. Grew † describes prophecy in this sense to be, "A declaration of the divine prescience, looking at any distance through a train of infinite causes, known and unknown to us, upon a sure and certain effect." Hence he infers, "That the being of prophecies supposes the non-being of contingents; for, though there are many things which seem to us to be contingents, yet, were they so indeed, there could have been no prophecy; and there can be no contingent seemingly so loose and independent but it is a link of some chain." And Huetius gives this reason why none but God can foretell things to come, Because every effect depends upon an infinite number of preceding causes, all which, in their order, must be known to him that foretels the effect, and therefore to God only, for he alone is omniscient. So Tully argues: *Qui teneat causas rerum futurarum, idem necesse est omnia teneat quæ futura sint; quod facere nemo nisi Deus potest*—*He who knows the causes of future events must necessarily know the events themselves; this is the prerogative of God alone* ‡. And therefore we find that by this the God of Israel proves himself to be God, that by his prophets he foretold things to come, which came to pass according to the prediction, Isa. xli. 9, 10. And by this he disproves the pretensions of the Pagan deities, that they could not show the things that were to come to pass hereafter, Isa. xli. 23. Tertullian proves the divine authority of the scripture from the fulfilling of scripture-prophecies: *Idoneum, opinor, testimonium divinitatis, veritas divinationis—I conceive the accomplishment of prophecy to be a satisfactory attestation from God* §. And, besides the foretelling of things to come, the discovering of things secret by revelation from God is a branch of prophecy, as Ahijah's discovering Jeroboam's wife in disguise, and Elisha's telling Gehazi what passed between him and Naaman. But || prophecy, in scripture language, is taken more largely for a declaration of such things to the children of men, either by word or

\* Demonstrat. Evang. pag. 15.  
§ Apol. cap. 20.

† Cosmol. sacra, lib. 4. cap. 6.

‡ Cicero de Divin. lib. 1  
Du Pin, Hist. of the Canon. lib. 1. cap. 2.

<sup>1</sup> That is, Isaiah and the remaining books of the Old Testament contained in this edition, in this and the next volume.



writing, as God has revealed to those that speak or write it, by vision, dream, or inspiration, guiding their minds, their tongues, and pens, by his Holy Spirit, and giving them not only ability, but authority, to declare such things in his name, and to preface what they say with, *Thus saith the Lord*. In this sense it is said, The prophecy of scripture came not in old time by the will of man, as other pious moral discourses might, but *holy men spoke* and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, 2 Pet. i. 20, 21. The same Holy Spirit that moved upon the face of the waters to produce the world moved upon the minds of the prophets to produce the Bible.

Now I think it is worthy to be observed that all nations, having had some sense of God and religion, have likewise had a notion of prophets and prophecy, have had a veneration for them, and a desire and expectation of acquaintance and communion with the gods they worshipped in that way. Witness their oracles, their augurs, and the many arts of divination they had in use among them in all the ages and all the countries of the world.

It is commonly urged as an argument against the atheists, to prove that there is a God, That all nations of the world acknowledged some god or other, some Being above them, to be worshipped and prayed to, to be trusted in and praised; the most ignorant and barbarous nations could not avoid the knowledge of it; the most learned and polite nations could not avoid the belief of it. And this is a sufficient proof of the general and unanimous consent of mankind to this truth, though far the greatest part of men made to themselves gods which yet were no gods. Now I think it may be urged with equal force against the Deists, for the proof of a divine revelation, that all nations of the world had, and had veneration for, that which they at least took to be a divine revelation, and could not live without it, though in this also they became *vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened*. But, if there were not a true deity and a true prophecy, there would never have been pretended deities and counterfeit prophecies.

Lycurgus and Numa, those two great lawgivers of the Spartan and Roman commonwealths, brought their people to an observance of their laws by possessing them with a notion that they had them by divine revelation, and so making it a point of religion to observe them. And those that have been ever so little conversant with the Greek and Roman histories, as well as with the more ancient ones of Chaldea and Egypt, cannot but remember what a profound deference their princes and great commanders, and not their unthinking commonalty only, paid to the oracles and prophets, and the prognostications of their soothsayers, which, in all cases of importance, were consulted with abundance of gravity and solemnity, and how often the resolutions of councils and the motions of mighty armies turned upon them, though they appeared ever so groundless and far-fetched.

There is a full account given by that learned philosopher and physician Caspar Peucer\* of the many kinds of divination and prediction used among the Gentiles, by which they took on them to tell the fortune both of states and particular persons. They were all, he says, reduced by Plato to two heads: *Divinatio Mavrici*, which was a kind of inspiration, or was thought to be so, the prophet or prophetess foretelling things to come by an internal *status* or fury; such was the oracle of Apollo at Delphos, and that of Jupiter Trophonius, which, with others like them, were famous for many ages, during the prevalence of the kingdom of darkness, but (as appears by some of the Pagan writers themselves) they were all silenced and struck dumb, when the gospel (that truly divine oracle) began to be preached to the nations. The other kind of divination was that which he calls *Oivavotici*, which was a prognostication by signs, according to rules of art, as by the flight of birds, the entrails of beasts, by stars or meteors, and abundance of ominous accidents, with which a foolish world was miserably imposed upon. A large account of this matter we have also in the late learned dissertations of Anton. Van Dale, to which I refer the reader†. But nothing of this kind made a greater noise in the Gentile world than the oracles of the Sibyls and their prophecies. Their name signifies a *divine counsel*: *Sibyllæ*, qu. *Siobulæ*, *Sios*, in the Æolic dialect, being put for *Theos*. Peucer says, "Almost every nation had its Sibyls, but those of Greece were most celebrated." They lived in several ages; the most ancient is said to be the *Sibylla Delphica*, who lived before the Trojan war, or about that time. The *Sibylla Erythraea* was the most noted; she lived about the time of Alexander the Great. But it is the *Sibylla Cumana* of whom the story goes that she presented herself, and nine books of oracles, to Tarquinius Superbus, which she offered to sell him at so vast a rate that he refused to purchase them, upon which she burnt three, and, upon his second refusal, three more, but made him give the same rate for the remaining three, which were deposited with great care in the Capitol. But, those being afterwards burnt accidentally with the Capitol, a collection was made of other Sibylline oracles, and those are they which Virgil refers to in his fourth Eclogue‡. All the oracles of the Sibyls that are extant were put together, and published, in Holland, not many years ago, by Servatius Gallæus, in Greek and Latin, with large and learned notes, together with all that could be met with of the metrical oracles that go under the names of Jupiter, Apollo, Serapis, and others, by Joannes Opsopæus.

The oracles of the Sibyls were appealed to by many of the fathers for the confirmation of the Christian religion. Justin Martyr§ appeals with a great deal of assurance, persuading the Greeks to give credit to that ancient Sibyl, whose works were extant all the world over; and to their testimony, and that of Hydaspis, he appeals concerning the general conflagration and the torments of hell. Clemens Alexandrinus|| often quotes the Sibyls' verses with great respect; so does Lactantius; ¶ St. Austin,\*\* *De Civitate Dei*, has the famous acrostic at large, said to be one of the oracles of the *Sibylla Erythraea*, the first letters of the verses making 'Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς Θεοῦ υἱὸς Σῶτηρ—Jesus Christ the Son of God the Saviour. Divers passages they produce out of those oracles which

\* De Principiis Divinationum Generibus, A. 1591.

† De Verâ ac Falsâ Prophetiâ, A. 1696.

‡ Vld. Virg. *Æneid.* lib. 6.

§ Ad Græcos Cohortat. *juxta finem*.

|| Apol. 2. p. mihl. 66. l.

¶ Quæst. et Respons. p. 456.

\*\* Aug. de Civ. Dei, lib. 18. cap. 23.



expressly foretel the coming of the Messiah, his being born of a virgin, his miracles, his sufferings, particularly his being buffeted, spit upon, crowned with thorns, having vinegar and gall given him to drink, &c. Whether these oracles were genuine and authentic or no has been much controverted among the learned. Baronius and the popish writers generally admit and applaud them, and build much upon them; so do some protestant writers; Isaac Vossius has written a great deal to support the reputation of them, and (as I find him quoted by Van Dale) will needs have it that they were formerly a part of the canon of scripture; and a learned prelate of our own nation, Bishop Montague, pleads largely, and with great assurance, for their authority, and is of opinion that some of them were divinely inspired. But many learned men look upon it to be a pious fraud, as they call it, concluding that those verses of the Sibyls which speak so very expressly of Christ and the future state were forged by some Christians and imposed upon the over-credulous. Huetius,\* though of the Romish church, condemns both the ancient and more modern compositions of the Sibyls, and refers his reader, for the proof of their vanity, to the learned Blondel. Van Dale and Gallæus look upon them to be a forgery. And the truth is they speak so much more particularly and plainly concerning our Saviour and the future state than any of the prophets of the Old Testament do, that we must conclude St. Paul, who was the apostle of the Gentiles, guilty not only of a very great omission (that in all his preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles, and in all his epistles to the Gentile churches, he never so much as mentions the prophecies of the Sibyls, nor vouches their authority, as he does that of the Old-Testament prophets, in his preaching and writing to the Jews), but likewise of a very great mistake, in making it the particular advantage which the Jews had above the Gentiles that to them were committed the oracles of God (Rom. iii. 1, 2), and that they were the children of the prophets, while he speaks of the Gentiles as sitting in darkness and being afar off. We cannot conceive that heathen women, and those actuated by dæmons, should speak more clearly and fully of the Messiah than those holy men did who, we are sure, were moved by the Holy Ghost, nor that the Gentiles should be entrusted with larger and earlier discoveries of the great salvation than that people of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ was to come. But enough, if not more than enough, of the pretenders to prophecy. It is a good remark which the learned Gallæus makes upon the great veneration which the Romans had for the oracles of the Sibyls, for which he quotes Dionysius Halicarnassæus, *Οὐδὲν οὐτὲ Ρῶμαίιοι φυλάττουσιν, οὐτὲ ὅσιον κτῆμα οὐτὲ ἱερὸν, ὥς τὰ Σιβύλλεια θεσφάτα*—*The Romans preserve nothing with such sacred care, nor do they hold any thing in such high estimation, as the Sibylline oracles. Illi si pro vitreis suis thesauris adeo decertarunt, quid nos pro genuinis nostris, à Deo inspiratis?*—*If they had such a value for these counterfeits, how precious should the true treasure of the divine oracles be to us!* Of these we come next to speak.

Prophecy, we are sure, was of equal date with the church; for *faith comes*, not by thinking and seeing, as philosophy does, but by hearing, *by hearing the word of God*, Rom. x. 17. In the antediluvian period Adam received divine revelation in the promise of the Seed of the woman, and no doubt communicated it, in the name of the Lord, to his seed, and was prophet, as well as priest, to his numerous family. Enoch was a prophet, and foretold perhaps the deluge, certainly the last judgment, that of the great day. *Behold the Lord comes*, Jude 14. When men began, as a church, to call upon the name of the Lord (Gen. iv. 26), or to call themselves by his name, they were blessed with prophets, for the prophecy came in old time (2 Pet. i. 21); it is venerable for its antiquity. When God renewed his covenant of providence (and that a figure of the covenant of grace) with Noah and his sons, we soon after find Noah, as a prophet, foretelling, not only the servitude of Canaan, but God's enlarging Japhet by Christ, and his dwelling in the tents of Shem, Gen. ix. 26, 27. And when, upon the general revolt of mankind to idolatry (as, in the former period, upon the apostasy of Cain), God distinguished a church for himself by the call of Abraham, and by his covenant with him and his seed, he conferred upon him and the other patriarchs the spirit of prophecy; for, when he reproved kings for their sakes, he said, *Tou'ch not my anointed*, who have received that unction from the Holy One, and *do my prophets no harm*, Ps. cv. 14, 15. And of Abraham he said expressly, *He is a prophet* (Gen. xx. 7); and it was with a prophetic eye, as a seer, that *Abraham saw Christ's day* (John viii. 56), saw it at so great a distance, and yet with so great an assurance triumphed in it. And Stephen seems to speak of the first settling of a correspondence between him and God, by which he was established to be a prophet, when he says, *The God of glory appeared to him* (Acts vii. 2), appeared in glory. Jacob, upon his death-bed, as a prophet, told his sons *what should befall them in the last days* (Gen. xlix. i. 10), and spoke very particularly concerning the Messiah.

Hitherto was the infancy of the church, and with it of prophecy; it was the dawning of that day; and that morning-light owed its rise to the Sun of righteousness, though he rose not till long after, but it shone more and more. During the bondage of Israel in Egypt, this, as other glories of the church, was eclipsed; but, as the church made a considerable and memorable advance in the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt and the forming of them into a people, so did the Spirit of prophecy in Moses, the illustrious instrument employed in that great service; and it was by that Spirit that he performed that service; so it is said, Hos. xii. 13, *By a prophet the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved through the wilderness to Canaan*, that is, by Moses as a prophet. It appears, by what God said to Aaron, that there were then other prophets among them, to whom God made known himself and his will in dreams and visions (Num. xii. 6), but to Moses he spoke in a peculiar manner, *mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches*, Num. xii. 8. Nay, such a plentiful effusion was there of the Spirit of prophecy at that time (because Moses was such a prophet as was to be a type of Christ the great prophet) that some of his Spirit was put upon seventy elders of Israel at once, and they prophesied, Num. xi. 25. What they

\* Demonstrat. p. 748.

said was extraordinary, and not only under the direction of a prophetic inspiration, but under the constraint of a prophetic impulse, as appears by the case of Eldad and Medad.

When Moses, that great prophet, was laying down his office, he promised Israel that the *Lord God would raise them up a prophet of their brethren like unto him*, Deut. xviii. 15, 18. In these words, says the learned Bishop Stillingfleet\* (though, in their full and complete sense, they relate to Christ, and to him they are more than once applied in the New Testament), there is included a promise of an order of prophets, which should succeed Moses in the Jewish church, and be the *λόγια ζώντα*—the living oracles among them (Acts vii. 38), by which they might know the mind of God; for, in the next words, he lays down rules for the trial of prophets, whether what they said was of God or no, and it is observable that that promise comes in immediately upon an express prohibition of the Pagan rites of divination and the consulting of wizards and familiar spirits: "You shall not need to do that" (said Moses), "for, to your much better satisfaction, you shall have prophets divinely inspired, by whom you may know from God himself both what to do and what to expect." But as Jacob's dying prophecy concerning the sceptre in Judah, and the law-giver between his feet, did not begin to be remarkably fulfilled till David's time, most of the Judges being of other tribes, so Moses's promise of a succession of prophets began not to receive its accomplishment till Samuel's time, a little before the other promise began to emerge and operate; and it was an introduction to the other, for it was by Samuel, as a prophet, that David was anointed king, which was an intimation that the prophetic office of our Redeemer should make way, both in the world and in the heart, for his kingly office; and therefore when he was asked, *Art thou a king?* (John xviii. 37) he answered, not evasively, but very pertinently, *I came to bear witness to the truth*, and so to rule as a king purely by the power of truth.

During the government of the Judges there was a pouring out of the Spirit, but more as a Spirit of skill and courage for war than as a Spirit of prophecy. Deborah is indeed called a *prophetess*, because of her extraordinary qualifications for judging Israel; but that is the only mention of prophecy, that I remember, in all the book of *Judges*. Extraordinary messages were sent by angels, as to Gideon and Manoah; and it is expressly said that before the word of the Lord came to Samuel (1 Sam. iii. 1) it was *precious*, it was very scarce, there was *no open vision*. And it was therefore with more than ordinary solemnity that the word of the Lord came first to Samuel; and by degrees notice and assurance were given to all Israel that *Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord*, 1 Sam. iii. 20. In Samuel's time, and by him, the schools of the prophets were erected, by which prophecy was dignified and provision made for a succession of prophets; for it should seem that in those colleges, hopeful young men were bred up in devotion, in a constant attendance upon the instruction the prophets gave from God, and under a strict discipline, as candidates, or probationers, for prophecy, who were called the *sons of the prophets*; and their religious exercises of prayer, conference, and psalmody especially, are called *prophesyings*; and their præfect, or president, is called *their father*, 1 Sam. x. 12. Out of these God ordinarily chose the prophets he sent; yet not always: Amos was no prophet nor prophet's son (Amos vii. 14), had not his education in the schools of the prophets, and yet was commissioned to go on God's errands, and (which is observable) though he had not academical education himself, yet he seems to speak of it with great respect when he reckons it among the favours God had bestowed upon Israel that he *raised up of their sons for prophets and of their young men for Nazarites*, Amos ii. 11.

It is worth noting that when the glory of the priesthood was eclipsed by the iniquity of the house of Eli, the desolations of Shiloh, and the obscurity of the ark, there was then a more plentiful effusion of the Spirit of prophecy than had been before; a standing ministry of another kind was thereby erected, and a succession of it kept up. And thus afterwards, in the kingdom of the ten tribes, where there was no legal priesthood at all, yet there were prophets and prophets' sons; in Ahab's time we meet with a hundred of them, whom Obadiah hid *by fifty in a cave*, 1 Kings xviii. 4. When the people of God, who desired to know his mind, were deprived of one way of instruction, God furnished them with another, and a less ceremonious one; for he left not himself without witness, nor them without a guide. And when they had no temple or altar that they could attend upon with any safety or satisfaction they had private meetings at the prophets' houses, to which the devout faithful worshippers of God resorted (as we find the good Shunamite did, 2 Kings iv. 23), and where they kept their new-moons and their sabbaths, comfortably, and to their edification.

David was himself a prophet; so St. Peter calls him (Acts ii. 30); and, though we read not of God's speaking to him by dreams and visions, yet we are sure that *the Spirit of the Lord spoke by him, and his word was in his tongue* (2 Sam. xxiii. 2), and he had those about him that were seers, that were his seers, as Gad and Iddo, that brought him messages from God, and wrote the history of his times. And now the productions of the Spirit of prophecy were translated into the service of the temple, not only in the model of the house which the Lord made David *understand in writing by his hand upon him* (1 Chron. xxviii. 19), but in the worship performed there; for there we find Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, prophesying with harps and other musical instruments, according to the order of the king, not to foretell things to come, but to *give thanks and to praise the Lord* (1 Chron. xxv. 1—3); yet, in their psalms, they spoke much of Christ and his kingdom, and the glory to be revealed.

In the succeeding reigns, both of Judah and Israel, we frequently meet with prophets sent on particular errands to Rehoboam, Jeroboam, Asa, and other kings, who, it is probable, instructed the people in the things of God at other times, though it is not recorded. But, prophecy growing into contempt with many, God revived the honour of it, and put a new lustre upon it, in the power



given to Elijah and Elisha to work miracles, and the great things that God did by them for the confirming of the people's faith in it, and the awakening of their regard to it, 2 Kings ii. 3; iv. 1, 38; v. 22; vi. 1. In their time, and by their agency, it should seem, the schools of the prophets were revived, and we find sons of the prophets, fellows of those sacred colleges, employed in carrying messages to the great men, as to Ahab (1 Kings xx. 35), and to Jehu, 2 Kings ix. 1.

Hitherto, the prophets of the Lord delivered their messages by word of mouth, only we read of one writing which came from Elijah the prophet to Jehoram king of Israel, 2 Chron. xxi. 12. The histories of those times which are left us were compiled by prophets, under a divine direction; and, when the Old Testament is divided into the Law and the Prophets, the historical books are, for that reason, reckoned among the prophets. But, in the later times of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, some of the prophets were divinely inspired to write their prophecies, or abstracts of them, and to leave them upon record, for the benefit of after-ages, that the children who should be born might praise the Lord for them, and, by comparing the event with the prediction, might have their faith confirmed. And, probably, those later prophets spoke more fully and plainly of the Messiah and his kingdom than their predecessors had done, and for that reason their prophecies were put in writing, not only for the encouragement of the pious Jews that looked for the consolation of Israel, but for the use of us Christians, upon whom the ends of the world have come, as David's psalms had been for the same reason, that the Old Testament and the New might mutually give light and lustre to each other. Many other faithful prophets there were at the same time, who spoke in God's name, who did not commit their prophecies to writing, but were of those whom God sent, rising up betimes and sending them, the contempt of whom, and of their messages, brought ruin without remedy upon that sottish people, that knew not the day of their visitation. In their captivity they had some prophets, some to *show them how long*; and though it was not by a prophet, like Moses, that they were brought out of Babylon, as they had been out of Egypt, but by Joshua the high priest first, and afterwards by Ezra the scribe, to show that God can do his work by ordinary means when he pleases, yet, soon after their return, the Spirit of prophecy was poured out plentifully, and continued (according to the Jews' computation) forty years in the second temple, but ceased in Malachi. Then (say the rabbins) *the Holy Spirit was taken from Israel*, and they had the benefit only of the *Bathkol*—the daughter of a voice, that is, a voice from heaven, which they look upon to be the lowest degree of divine revelation. Now herein they are witnesses against themselves for rejecting the true Messiah, for our Lord Jesus, and he only, was spoken to by a voice from heaven at his baptism, his transfiguration, and his entrance on his sufferings.

In John the Baptist prophecy revived, and therefore in him the gospel is said to begin, when the church had had no prophets for above 300 years. We have not only the *vox populi*—the voice of the people to prove John a prophet, for all the people counted him so, but *vox Dei*—the voice of God too; for Christ calls him a prophet, Matt. xi. 9, 10. He had an extraordinary commission from God to call people to repentance, was filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb, and was therefore called the prophet of the Highest, because he went before the face of the Lord, to prepare his way (Luke i. 15, 16); and though he did no miracle, nor gave any sign or wonder, yet this proved him a true prophet, that all he said of Christ was true, John x. 41. Nay, and this proved him more than a prophet, than any of the other prophets, that whereas by other prophets Christ was discovered as at a great distance, by him he was discovered as already come, and he was enabled to say, *Behold the Lamb of God*. But after the ascension of our Lord Jesus there was a more plentiful effusion of the Spirit of prophecy than ever before; then was the promise fulfilled that God would pour out his Spirit upon all flesh (and not as hitherto upon the Jews only), and their sons and their daughters should prophesy, Acts ii. 16, &c. The gift of tongues was one new product of the Spirit of prophecy, and given for a particular reason, that, the Jewish pale being taken down, all nations might be brought into the church. These and other gifts of prophecy, being for a sign, have long since ceased and laid aside, and we have no encouragement to expect the revival of them; but, on the contrary, are directed to call the scriptures the more sure word of prophecy, more sure than voices from heaven; and to them we are directed to take heed, to search them, and to hold them fast, 2 Pet. i. 19. All God's spiritual Israel know that they are established to be the oracles of God (1 Sam. iii. 20), and if any add to, or take from, the book of that prophecy, they may read their doom in the close of it; God shall take blessings from them, and add curses to them, Rev. xxii. 18, 19.

Now concerning the prophets of the Old Testament, whose writings are before us, observe,

I. That they were all holy men. We are assured by the apostle that the prophecy came in old time by holy men of God (and men of God they were commonly called, because they were devoted to him), who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. They were men, subject to like passions as we are (so Elijah, one of the greatest of them, is said to have been, Jam. v. 17); but they were holy men, men that in the temper of their minds, and the tenour of their lives, were examples of serious piety. Though there were many pretenders, that, without warrant, said, *Thus saith the Lord*, when he sent them not, and some that prophesied in Christ's name, but he never knew them, and they indeed were workers of iniquity (Matt. vii. 22, 23), and though the cursing blaspheming lips of Balaam and Caiaphas, even when they actually designed mischief, were over-ruled to speak oracles, yet none were employed and commissioned to speak as prophets but those that had received the Spirit of grace and sanctification; for holiness becomes God's house. The Jewish doctors universally agree in this rule, That the Spirit of prophecy never rests upon any but a holy and wise man, and one whose passions are allayed,\* or, as others express it, a humble man and a man of fortitude, that is, one that has power to keep his sensual animal part in due subjection to religion and right reason. And some of them† give this rule, That the Spirit of prophecy does not reside

\* See Mr. Smith on Prophecy

† Gemara Schab. c. 2.



where there are either, on the one hand, grief and melancholy, or, on the other hand, laughter and lightness of behaviour, and impertinent idle talk: and it is commonly observed by them, both from the musical instruments used in the schools of the prophets in Samuel's time and from the instance of Elisha's calling for a minstrel (2 Kings iii. 15), that the divine presence does not reside with sadness, but with cheerfulness, and Elisha, they say, had not yet recovered himself from the sorrow he conceived at parting with Elijah. They have also a tradition (but I know no ground for it) that all the while Jacob mourned for Joseph, the Shechinah, or Holy Spirit, withdrew from him. Yet I believe that when David intimates that by his sin in the matter of Uriah he had lost the right Spirit, and the free Spirit, Ps. li. 10, 12 (which therefore he begs might be renewed in him and restored to him), it was not because he was under grief, but because he was under guilt. And therefore, in order to the return of that right and free Spirit, he prays that God would create in him a clean heart.

II. That they had all a full assurance in themselves of their divine mission; and (though they could not always prevail to satisfy others) they were abundantly satisfied themselves that what they delivered as from God, and in his name, was indeed from him; and with the same assurance did the apostles speak of the word of life, as that which they had heard, and seen, and looked on, and which their hands had handled, 1 John i. 1. Nathan spoke from himself when he encouraged David to build the temple, but afterwards knew he spoke from God when, in his name, he forbade him to do it. God had various ways of making known to his prophets the messages they were to deliver to his people; it should seem, ordinarily, to have been by the ministry of angels. In the Apocalypse Christ is expressly said to have signified by his angel to his servant John, Rev. i. 1. It was sometimes done in a vision when the prophet was awake, sometimes in a dream when the prophet was asleep, and sometimes by a secret but strong impression upon the mind of the prophet. But Maimonides has laid down, as a maxim, That all prophecy makes itself known to the prophet that it is prophecy indeed; that is, says another of the rabbins, By the vigour and liveliness of the perception whereby he apprehends the thing propounded (which Jeremiah intimates when he says, *The word of the Lord was as a fire in my bones*, Jer. xx. 9), and therefore they always spoke with great assurance, knowing they should be justified, Isa. l. 7.

III. That in their prophesying, both in receiving their message from God and in delivering it to the people, they always kept possession of their own souls. Dan. x. 8. Though sometimes their bodily strength was overpowered by the abundance of the revelations, and their eyes were dazzled with the visionary light, as in the instances of Daniel and John (Rev. i. 17), yet still their understanding remained with them, and the free exercise of their reason. This is excellently well expressed by a learned writer of our own: \* "The prophetic Spirit, seating itself in the rational powers as well as in the imagination, did never alienate the mind, but inform and enlighten it; and those that were actuated by it always maintained a clearness and consistency of reason, with strength and solidity of judgment. For" (says he afterwards †) "God did not make use of idiots or fools to reveal his will by, but such whose intellects were entire and perfect; and he imprinted such a clear copy of his truth upon them as that it became their own sense, being digested fully into their understandings, so that they were able to deliver and represent it to others as truly as any can paint forth his own thoughts." God's messengers were speaking men, not speaking trumpets. The Fathers frequently took notice of this difference between the prophets of the Lord and the false prophets—that the pretenders to prophecy (who either were actuated by an evil spirit or were under the force of a heated imagination) underwent alienations of mind, and delivered what they had to say in the utmost agitation and disorder, as the Pythian prophetess, who delivered her infernal oracles with many antic gestures, tearing her hair and foaming at the mouth. And by this rule they condemned the Montanists, who pretended to prophecy, in the second century, that what they said was in a way of ecstasy, not like rational men, but like men in a frenzy. Chrysostom, ‡ having described the furious violent motions of the pretenders to prophecy, adds, *Ὁ δὲ Ἰπποκρίτης οὐκ οὕτως*—A true prophet does not do so. *Sed mente sobrid, et constanti animi statu, et intelligens quæ profert, omnia pronunciat*—He understands what he utters, and utters it soberly and calmly. And Jerome, in his preface to his Commentaries upon Nahum, observes that it is called the book of the vision of Nahum. *Non enim loquitur in êcstasi, sed est liber intelligentis omnia quæ loquitur*—For he speaks not in an ecstasy, but as one who understands every thing he says. And again, § *Non ut amens loquitur propheta, nec in morem insanientium fœminarum dat sine mente sonum*—The prophet speaks not as an insane person, nor, like women wrought into fury, does he utter sound without sense.

IV. That they all aimed at one and the same thing, which was to bring people to repent of their sins and to return to God and to do their duty to him. This was the errand on which all God's messengers were sent, to beat down sin, and to revive and advance serious piety. The burden of every song was, *Turn you now every one from his evil way; amend your ways and your doings, and execute judgment between a man and his neighbour*, Jer. vii. 3, 5. See Zech. vii. 8, 9; viii. 16. The scope and design of all their prophecies were to enforce the precepts and sanctions of the law of Moses, the moral law, which is of universal and perpetual obligation. Here is nothing of the ceremonial institutes, of the carnal ordinances that were imposed only till the times of reformation, Heb. ix. 10. Those were now waxing old and ready to vanish away; but they make it their business to press the great and weighty matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and truth.

V. That they all bore witness to Jesus Christ and had an eye to him. God raising up the horn of salvation for us, in the house of his servant David, was consonant to, and in pursuance of, what he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets who have been since the world began, Luke i. 69, 70. They

\* Smith on Prophecy, p. 190.

† Pag. 266

‡ In 1 Cor. 12. 1

§ Prolog. in Habac.

propheesied of the grace that should come to us, and it was the Spirit of Christ in them, one and the same Spirit, that testified beforehand the *sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow*, 1 Pet. i. 10, 11. Christ was then made known, and yet comparatively hid, in the predictions of the prophets, as before in the types of the ceremonial law. And the learned Huetius\* observes it as really admirable that so many persons, in different ages, should conspire with one consent, as it were, to foretel, some one particular and others another, concerning Christ, all which had, at length, their full accomplishment in him. *Ab ipsis mundi incunabilis, per quatuor annorum millia, uno ore venturum Christum prædixerunt viri complures, in ejusque ortu, vitâ, virtutibus, rebus gestis, morte, ac totâ denique Oikovoia præmonstranda consenserunt*—From the earliest period of time, for 4000 years, a great number of men have predicted the advent of Christ, and presented a harmonious statement of his birth, life, character, actions, and death, and of that economy which he came to establish.

VI. That these prophets were generally hated and abused in their several generations by those that lived with them. Stephen challenges his judges to produce an instance to the contrary: *Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?* Yea, and, as it should seem, for this reason, because they showed before of the coming of the Just One, Acts vii. 52. Some there were that trembled at the word of God in their mouths, but by the most they were ridiculed and despised, and (as ministers are now by profane people) made a jest of (Hos. ix. 7); the prophet was the fool in the play. *Wherefore came this mad fellow unto thee?* (2 Kings ix. 11) said one of the captains concerning one of the sons of the prophets! The Gentiles never treated their false prophets so ill as the Jews did their true prophets, but, on the contrary, had them always in veneration. The Jews' mocking the messengers of the Lord, killing the prophets, and stoning those that were sent unto them, was as amazing unaccountable an instance of the enmity that is in the carnal mind against God as any that can be produced. And this makes their rejection of Christ's gospel the less strange, that the Spirit of prophecy, which, for many ages, was so much the glory of Israel, in every age met with so much opposition, and there were those that *always resisted the Holy Ghost in the prophets, and turned that glory into shame*, Acts vii. 51. But this was it that was the measure-filling sin of Israel, that brought upon them both their first destruction by the Chaldeans and their final ruin by the Romans, 2 Chron. xxxvi. 16.

VII. That though men slighted these prophets, God owned them and put honour upon them. As they were men of God, his immediate servants and his messengers, so he always showed himself the Lord God of the holy prophets (Rev. xxii. 6), stood by them and strengthened them, and by his Spirit they were full of power; and those that slighted them, when they had lost them, were made to know, to their confusion, that a prophet had been among them. What was said of one of the primitive fathers of the prophets was true of them all, *The Lord was with them, and did let none of their words fall to the ground*, 1 Sam. iii. 19. What they said by way of warning and encouragement, for the enforcing of their calls to repentance and reformation, was to be understood conditionally. When God spoke by them either, on the one hand, to build and to plant, or, on the other hand, to pluck up and pull down, the change of the people's way might produce a change of God's way (Jer. xviii. 7—10); such was Jonah's prophecy of Nineveh's ruin within forty days; or God might sometimes be better than his word in granting a reprieve. But what they said by way of prediction of a particular matter, and as a sign, did always come to pass exactly as it was foretold; yea, and the general predictions, sooner or later, took hold even of those that would fain have got clear of them (Zech. i. 6); for this is that which God glories in, that he *confirms the word of his servants and performs the counsel of his messengers*, Isa. xlv. 26.

In opening these prophecies I have endeavoured to give the genuine sense of them, as far as I could reach it, by consulting the best expositors, considering the scope and coherence, and comparing spiritual things with spiritual, the spiritual things of the Old Testament with those of the New, and especially by prayer to God for the guidance and direction of the Spirit of truth. But, after all, there are many things here dark and hard to be understood, concerning the certain meaning of which though I could not gain myself, much less expect to give my reader, full satisfaction, yet I have not, with the unlearned and unstable, wrested them to the destruction of any, 2 Pet. iii. 16. It is the prerogative of the Lamb of God to take this book and to open all its seals. I have likewise endeavoured to accommodate these prophecies to the use and service of those who desire to read the scripture, not only with understanding, but with pious affections, and to their edification in faith and holiness. And we shall find that whatever is given by inspiration of God is profitable (2 Tim. iii. 16), though not all alike profitable, not all alike easy or improvable; but, when the mystery of God shall be finished, we shall see, what we are now bound to believe, that there is not one idle word in all the prophecies of this book. What God has said, as well as what he does, we know not now, but we shall know hereafter.

The pleasure I have had in studying and meditating upon those parts of these prophecies which are plain and practical, and especially those which are evangelical, has been an abundant balance to, and recompence for, the harder tasks we have met with in other parts that are more obscure. In many parts of this field the treasure must be dug for, as that in the mines; but in other parts the surface is covered with rich and precious products, with corn, and flocks, of which we may say, as was said of Noah, These same have comforted us greatly concerning our work and the toil of our hands, and have made it very pleasant and delightful; God grant it may be no less so to the readers!

And now let me desire the assistance of my friends, in setting up my Eben-Ezer here, in a thankful acknowledgment that hitherto the Lord has helped me. I desire to praise God that he has spared my life to finish the Old Testament, and has graciously given me some tokens of his

\* Demonstrat. Evang. p. 737.



presence with me in carrying this work, though the more I reflect upon myself the more unworthy I see myself of the honour of being thus employed, and the more need I see of Christ and his merit and grace. *Remember me, O my God! for good, and spare me according to the multitude of thy mercies.* The Lord forgive what is mine, and accept what is his own!

I purpose, if God continue my life and health, according to the measure of the grace given to me, and in a constant and entire dependence upon divine strength, to go through the New Testament in two volumes more. I intimated in my preface to the first volume that I had drawn up some expositions upon some parts of the New Testament; namely, The gospels of St. Matthew and St. John; but they are so large that, to make them bear some proportion to the rest, it is necessary that they be much contracted, so that I shall be obliged to write them all over again, and to make considerable alterations, and therefore I cannot expect they should be published but as these hitherto have been, if God permit, a volume every other year. I shall begin it now shortly, if the Lord will, and apply myself to it as closely as I can; and I earnestly desire the prayers of all that wish well to the undertaking that, if the Lord spare me to go on with it, I may be enabled to do it well, and so as that by it some may be led into the *riches of the full assurance of understanding in the mystery of God, even of the Father and of Christ*, Col. ii. 2. And, if it shall please God to remove me by death before it be finished, I trust I shall be able to say not only, *Welcome his blessed will, but, Welcome that blessed world, in which, though now we know but in part, and prophecy but in part, that knowledge which is perfect will come, and that which is partial will be done away* (1 Cor. xiii. 8—10, 12), in which all our mistakes will be rectified, all our doubts resolved, all our deficiencies made up, all our endeavours in preaching, catechising, and expounding, superseded and rendered useless, and all our prayers swallowed up in everlasting praises,—in which prophecy, now so much admired, shall fail, and tongues shall cease, and the knowledge we have now shall vanish away, as the light of the morning-star does when the sun has risen,—in which we shall no longer see through a glass darkly, but face to face. In a believing, comfortable, well-grounded, expectation of that true and perfect light, I desire to continue, living and dying; in a humble and diligent preparation for it let me spend my time, and in the full enjoyment of it Oh that I may spend a glorious eternity!

JULY 13, 1773

*M. H.*



AN

# EXPOSITION,

## WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,

OF THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET

# I S A I A H.

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PROPHET is a title that sounds very great to those that understand it, though, in the eye of the world, many of those that were dignified with it appeared very mean. A prophet is one that has a great intimacy with Heaven and a great interest there, and consequently a commanding authority upon earth. Prophecy is put for all divine revelation (2 Pet. i. 20, 21), because that was most commonly by dreams, voices, or visions, communicated to prophets first, and by them to the children of men, Num. xii. 6. Once indeed God himself spoke to all the thousands of Israel from the top of Mount Sinai; but the effect was so intolerably dreadful that they entreated God would for the future speak to them as he had done before, by men like themselves, *whose terror should not make them afraid, nor their hands be heavy upon them*, Job xxxiii. 7. God approved the motion (*they have well said*, says he, Deut. v. 27, 28), and the matter was then settled by consent of parties, that we must never expect to hear from God any more in that way, but by prophets, who received their instructions immediately from God, with a charge to deliver them to his church. Before the sacred canon of the Old Testament began to be written there were prophets, who were instead of Bibles to the church. Our Saviour seems to reckon Abel among the prophets, Matt. xxiii. 31. 35. Enoch was a prophet; and by him *that* was first in prediction which is to be last in execution—the judgment of the great day. Jude 14, *Behold, the Lord comes with his holy myriads*. Noah was a preacher of righteousness. God said of Abraham, *He is a prophet*, Gen. xx. 7. Jacob foretold things to come, Gen. xlix. 1. Nay, all the patriarchs are called *prophets*. Ps. cv. 15, *Do my prophets no harm*. Moses was, beyond all comparison, the most illustrious of all the Old-Testament prophets, for with him the Lord spoke *face to face*, Deut. xxxiv. 10. He was the first writing prophet, and by his hand the first foundations of holy writ were laid. Even those that were called to be his assistants in the government had the spirit of prophecy, such a plentiful effusion was there of that spirit at that time, Num. xi. 25. But after the death of Moses, for some ages, the Spirit of the Lord appeared and acted in the church of Israel more as a martial spirit than as a spirit of prophecy, and inspired men more for acting than speaking. I mean in the time of the judges. We find the Spirit of the Lord coming upon Othniel, Gideon, Samson, and others, for the service of their country, with their swords, not with their pens. Messages were then sent from heaven by angels, as to Gideon and Manoah, and to the people, Judges ii. 1. In all the book of Judges there is never once mention of a prophet, only Deborah is called a prophetess. Then the word of the Lord was precious; there was no open vision, 1 Sam. iii. 1. They had the law of Moses, recently written; let them study that. But in Samuel prophecy revived, and in him a famous epocha, or period, of the church began, a time of great light in a constant uninterrupted succession of prophets, till some time after the captivity, when the canon of the Old Testament was completed in Malachi, and then prophecy ceased for nearly 400 years, till the coming of the great prophet and his forerunner. Some prophets were divinely inspired to write the histories of the church. But they did not put their names to their writings; they only referred for proof to the authentic records of those times, which were known to be drawn up by prophets, as Gad, Iddo, &c. David and others were prophets, to write sacred songs for the use of the church. After them we often read of prophets sent on particular errands, and raised up for special public services, among whom the most famous were Elijah and Elisha in the kingdom of Israel. But none of these put their prophecies in writing, nor have we any remains of them but some fragments in the histories of their times; there was nothing of their own writing (that I remember) but one epistle of Elijah's, 2 Chron. xxi. 12

## ISAIAH.

But, towards the latter end of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, it pleased God to direct his servants the prophets to write and publish some of their sermons, or abstracts of them. The dates of many of their prophecies are uncertain, but the earliest of them was in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and Jeroboam the second, his contemporary, king of Israel, about 200 years before the captivity, and not long after Joash had slain Zechariah the son of Jehoiada in the courts of the temple. If they begin to murder the prophets, yet they shall not murder their prophecies; these shall remain as witnesses against them. Hosea was the first of the writing prophets; and Joel, Amos, and Obadiah, published their prophecies about the same time. Isaiah began some time after, and not long; but his prophecy is placed first, because it is the largest of them all, and has most in it of him to whom all the prophets bore witness; and indeed so much of Christ that he is justly styled the *Evangelical Prophet*, and, by some of the ancients, a *fifth Evangelist*. We shall have the general title of this book (v. 1) and therefore shall here only observe some things,

- I. Concerning the prophet himself. He was (if we may believe the tradition of the Jews) of the royal family, his father being (they say) brother to king Uzziah. He was certainly much at court, especially in Hezekiah's time, as we find in his story, to which many think it is owing that his style is more curious and polite than that of some other of the prophets, and, in some places, exceedingly lofty and soaring. The Spirit of God sometimes served his own purpose by the particular genius of the prophet; for prophets were not speaking trumpets, *through* which the Spirit spoke, but speaking men, *by* whom the Spirit spoke, making use of their natural powers, in respect both of light and flame, and advancing them above themselves.
- II. Concerning the prophecy. It is transcendently excellent and useful; it was so to the church of God then, serving for conviction of sin, direction in duty, and consolation in trouble. Two great distresses of the church are here referred to, and comfort prescribed in reference to them, that by Sennacherib's invasion, which happened in his own time, and that of the captivity in Babylon, which happened long after; and in the supports and encouragements laid up for each of these times of need we find abundance of the grace of the gospel. There are not so many quotations in the gospels out of any, perhaps not out of all, the prophecies of the Old Testament, as out of this; nor such express testimonies concerning Christ, witness that of his being born of a virgin (*ch. vii.*) and that of his sufferings, *ch. liii.* The beginning of this book abounds most with reproofs for sin and threatenings of judgment; the latter end of it is full of good words and comfortable words. This method the Spirit of Christ took formerly in the prophets and does still, first to convince and then to comfort; and those that would be blessed with the comforts must submit to the convictions. Doubtless Isaiah preached many sermons, and delivered many messages to the people, which are not written in this book, as Christ did; and probably these sermons were delivered more largely and fully than they are here related, but so much is left on record as Infinite Wisdom thought fit to convey to us *on whom the ends of the world have come*; and these prophecies, as well as the histories of Christ, are written *that we might believe on the name of the Son of God, and that, believing, we might have life through his name*; for to us is the gospel here preached as well as unto those that lived then, and more clearly. O that it may be mixed with faith!

### CHAP. I.

The first verse of this chapter is intended for a title to the whole book, and it is probable that this was the first sermon that this prophet was appointed to publish and to affix in writing (as Calvin thinks the custom of the prophets was) to the door of the temple, as with our proclamations are fixed to public places, that all might read them (*Isaiah* ii. 2); and those that would might take out authentic copies of them, the original being, after some time, laid up by the priests among the records of the temple. The sermon which is contained in this chapter has in it, I. A high charge exhibited, in God's name, against the Jewish church and nation, I. For their ingratitude, *ver. 2, 3.* 2. For their inconsiderateness, *ver. 3.* 3. For the universal corruption and degeneracy of the people, *ver. 4, 5, 21, 22.* 4. For the perversion of justice by their rulers, *ver. 23.* II. A complaint of the judgments of God, which they had brought upon themselves by their sin, and (y<sup>e</sup> which they were brought almost to utter ruin, *ver. 7, 8, 11.* A just rejection of those shows and shadows of religion which they kept up among them, notwithstanding this general denudation and apostasy, *ver. 10—15.* IV. An earnest call to repentance and reformation, setting before them life and death, *as if they complied with the call and death if they did not, ver. 16—20.* V. A threatening of ruin to those that would not be reformed, *ver. 24, 25—31.* VI. A promise of a happy reformation at last, and a return to their primitive purity and prosperity, *ver. 33—37.* And all this is to be applied by us, not only to the communities we are members of, in their public interests, but to the state of our own souls.

Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

Here is, I. The name of the prophet, *Isaiah*, or *Jesiahiah* (for so it is in the Hebrew), which, in the New Testament, is read *Esaias*. His name signifies *the salvation of the Lord*—a proper name for a prophet by whom God gives knowledge of salvation to his people, especially for this prophet, who prophesies so much of Jesus the Saviour and of the great salvation wrought out by him. He is said to be *the son of Amoz*, not Amos the prophet (the two names in the Hebrew differ more than in the English), but, as the Jews think, of Amoz the brother, or son, of Amaziah king of Judah, a tradition as uncertain as that rule which they give, That, where a prophet's father is named, he also was himself a prophet. The prophets' pupils and successors are indeed often called their *sons*, but we have few instances,

THE vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning



if any, of their own sons being their successors

II. The nature of the prophecy. It is a vision, being revealed to him in a vision, when he was *awake, and heard the words of God, and saw the visions of the Almighty* (as Balaam speaks, Num. xxiv. 4), though perhaps it was not so illustrious a vision at first as that afterwards, *ch. vi. 1*. The prophets were called *seers*, or seeing men, and therefore their prophecies are fitly called *visions*. It was what he saw with the eyes of his mind, and foresaw as clearly by divine revelation, was as well assured of it, as fully apprised of it, and as much affected with it, as if he had seen it with his bodily eyes. Note 1. God's prophets saw what they spoke of, knew what they said, and require our belief of nothing but what they themselves believed and were sure of, John vi. 69; 1 John i. 1. 2. They could not but speak what they saw, because they saw how much all about them were concerned in it, Acts iv. 20; 2 Cor. iv. 13.

III. The subject of the prophecy. It was what he saw concerning *Judah and Jerusalem*, the country of the two tribes, and that city which was their metropolis; and there is little in it relating to Ephraim, or the ten tribes, of whom there is so much in the prophecy of Hosea. Some chapters there are in this book which relate to Babylon, Egypt, Tyre, and some other neighbouring nations; but it takes its title from that which is the main substance of it, and is therefore said to be concerning *Judah and Jerusalem*, the other nations spoken of being such as the people of the Jews had concerns with. Isaiah brings to them in a special manner, 1. Instruction; for it is the privilege of Judah and Jerusalem that to them pertain the oracles of God. 2. Reproof and threatening; for if in Judah, where God is known, if in Salem, where his name is great, iniquity be found, they, sooner than any other, shall be reckoned with for it. 3. Comfort and encouragement in evil times; for the children of Zion shall be joyful in their king.

IV. The date of the prophecy. Isaiah prophesied in the days of *Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah*. By this it appears, 1. That he prophesied long, especially if (as the Jews say) he was at last put to death by Manasseh, to a cruel death, being sawn asunder, to which some suppose the apostle refers, Heb. xi. 37. From the year that king Uzziah died (*ch. vi. 1*) to Hezekiah's sickness and recovery was forty-seven years; how much before, and after, he prophesied, is not certain; some reckon sixty, others eighty years in all. It was an honour to him, and a happiness to his country, that he was continued so long in his usefulness; and we must suppose both that he began young and that he held out to old age; for the prophets were not tied, as the priests were, to a cer-

tain age, for the beginning or ending of their ministration. 2. That he passed through variety of times. Jotham was a good king, and Hezekiah a better, and no doubt gave encouragement to and took advice from this prophet, were patrons to him, and he a privy-counsellor to them; but between them, and when Isaiah was in the prime of his time, the reign of Ahaz was very profane and wicked; then, no doubt, he was frowned upon at court, and, it is likely, forced to abscond. Good men and good ministers must expect bad times in this world, and prepare for them. Then religion was run down to such a degree that the *doors of the house of the Lord were shut up* and idolatrous altars were erected in every corner of Jerusalem; and Isaiah, with all his divine eloquence and messages immediately from God himself, could not help it. The best men, the best ministers, cannot do the good they would do in the world.

2 Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. 3 The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. 4 Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. 5 Why should ye be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. 6 From the sole of the foot even unto the head *there is* no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. 7 Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and *it is* desolate, as overthrown by strangers. 8 And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. 9 Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.

We will hope to meet with a brighter and

more pleasant scene before we come to the end of this book; but truly here, in the beginning of it, every thing looks very bad, very black, with Judah and Jerusalem. What is the wilderness of the world, if the church, the vineyard, has such a dismal aspect as this?

I. The prophet, though he speaks in God's name, yet, despairing to gain audience with the children of his people, addresses himself to the heavens and the earth, and bespeaks their attention (v. 2): *Hear, O heavens! and give ear, O earth!* Sooner will the inanimate creatures hear, who observe the law and answer the end of their creation, than this stupid senseless people. Let the lights of heaven shame their darkness, and the fruitfulness of the earth their barrenness, and the strictness of each to its time their irregularity. Moses begins thus in Deut. xxxii. 1, to which the prophet here refers, intimating that now those times had come which Moses there foretold, Deut. xxxi. 29. Or this is an appeal to heaven and earth, to angels and then to the inhabitants of the upper and lower world. Let them judge between God and his vineyard: can either produce such an instance of ingratitude? Note, God will be justified when he speaks, and both heaven and earth shall declare his righteousness, Mic. vi. 1, 2; Ps. l. 6.

II. He charges them with base ingratitude, a crime of the highest nature. Call a man ungrateful, and you can call him no worse. Let heaven and earth hear and wonder at, 1. God's gracious dealings with such a peevish provoking people as they were: "I have nourished and brought them up as children; they have been well fed and well taught" (Deut. xxxii. 6); "I have magnified and exalted them" (so some), "not only made them grow, but made them great—not only maintained them, but preferred them—not only trained them up, but raised them high." Note, We owe the continuance of our lives and comforts, and all our advancements, to God's fatherly care of us and kindness to us. 2. Their ill-natured conduct towards him, who was so tender of them: "*They have rebelled against me,*" or (as some read it) "they have revolted from me; they have been deserters, nay traitors, against my crown and dignity." Note, All the instances of God's favour to us, as the God both of our nature and of our nurture, aggravate our treacherous departures from him and all our presumptuous oppositions to him—children, and yet rebels!

III. He attributes this to their ignorance and inconsideration (v. 3): *The ox knows, but Israel does not.* Observe, 1. The sagacity of the ox and the ass, which are not only brute creatures, but of the dullest sort; yet the ox has such a sense of duty as to know his owner and to serve him, to submit to his yoke and to draw in it; the ass has such a sense of interest as to know his mas-

ter's crib, or manger, where he is fed, and to abide by it; he will go to that of himself if he be turned loose. A fine pass man has come to when he is shamed even in knowledge and understanding by these silly animals, and is not only sent to school to them (Prov. vi. 6, 7), but set in a form below them (Jer. viii. 7), *taught more than the beasts of the earth* (Job xxxv. 11) and yet knowing less. 2. The sottishness and stupidity of Israel. God is their owner and proprietor. He made us, and his we are more than our cattle are ours; he has provided well for us; providence is our Master's crib: yet many that are called the people of God do not know and will not consider this, but ask, "*What is the Almighty, that we should serve him?*" He is not our owner; and *what profit shall we have if we pray unto him?* He has no crib for us to feed at." He had complained (v. 2) of the obstinacy of their wills: *They have rebelled against me.* Here he runs it up to its cause: "*Therefore they have rebelled because they do not know, they do not consider.*" The understanding is darkened, and therefore the whole soul is alienated from the life of God, Eph. iv. 18. "*Israel does not know,* though their land is a land of light and knowledge; *in Judah is God known,* yet, because they do not live up to what they know, it is in effect as if they did not know. They know; but their knowledge does them no good, because they do not consider what they know; they do not apply it to their case, nor their minds to it." Note, (1.) Even among those that profess themselves God's people, that have the advantages and lie under the engagements of his people, there are many that are very careless in the affairs of their souls. (2.) Inconsideration of what we do know is as great an enemy to us in religion as ignorance of what we should know. (3.) *Therefore men revolt from God, and rebel against him,* because they do not know and consider their obligations to God, in duty, gratitude, and interest.

IV. He laments the universal pravity and corruption of their church and kingdom. The disease of sin was epidemic, and all orders and degrees of men were infected with it: *Ah sinful nation!* v. 4. The prophet bemoans those that would not bemoan themselves: Alas for them! woe to them! He speaks with a holy indignation at their degeneracy, and a dread of the consequences of it. See here,

1. How he aggravates their sin, and shows the malignity that there was in it, v. 4. (1.) The wickedness was universal. They were a sinful nation; the generality of the people were vicious and profane. They were so in their national capacity. In the management of their public treaties abroad, and in the administration of public justice at home, they were corrupt. Note, It is ill with a people when sin becomes national. (2.) It



was very great and heinous in its nature. They were *laden with iniquity*; the guilt of it, and the curse incurred by that guilt, lay very heavily upon them. It was a heavy charge that was exhibited against them, and one which they could never clear themselves from; their wickedness was upon them as *a talent of lead*, Zech. v. 7, 8. Their sin, as it did easily beset them and they were prone to it, was a weight upon them, Heb. xii. 1. (3) They came of a bad stock, were a *seed of evil-doers*. Treachery ran in the blood; they had it by kind, which made the matter so much the worse, more provoking and less curable. They rose up in their fathers' stead, and trod in their fathers' steps, *to fill up the measure of their iniquity*, Num. xxxii. 14. They were a race and family of rebels. (4.) Those that were themselves debauched did what they could to debauch others. They were not only corrupt children, born tainted, but *children that were corrupters*, that propagated vice, and infected others with it—not only sinners, but tempters—not only actuated by Satan, but agents for him. If those that are called *children, God's children*, that are looked upon as belonging to his family, be wicked and vile, their example is of the most malignant influence. (5.) Their sin was a treacherous departure from God. They were deserters from their allegiance: "*They have forsaken the Lord, to whom they had joined themselves; they have gone away backward, are alienated or separated from God, have turned the back upon him, deserted their colours, and quitted their service.*" When they were urged forward, they ran backward, *as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, as a backsliding heifer*, Hos. iv. 16. (6.) It was an impudent and daring defiance of him: *They have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger wilfully and designedly*; they knew what would anger him, and that they did. Note, The backslidings of those that have professed religion and relation to God are in a special manner provoking to him.

2. How he illustrates it by a comparison taken from a sick and diseased body, all overspread with leprosy, or, like Job's, with sore boils, v. 5, 6. (1.) The distemper has seized the vitals, and so threatens to be mortal. Diseases in the head and heart are most dangerous; now the head, the whole head, is sick—the heart, the whole heart, is faint. They had become corrupt in their judgment: the leprosy was in their head. They were utterly unclean; their affection to God and religion was cold and gone; the *things which remained were ready to die away*, Rev. iii. 2. (2.) It has overspread the whole body, and so becomes exceedingly noisome: *From the sole of the foot even to the head, from the meanest peasant to the greatest peer, there is no soundness, no good principles, no religion* (for that is

the health of the soul), nothing but *wounds and bruises*, guilt and corruption, the sad effects of Adam's fall, noisome to the holy God, painful to the sensible soul; they were so to David when he complained (Ps. xxxviii. 5), *My wounds stink, and are corrupt, because of my foolishness*. See Ps. xxxii. 3, 4. No attempts were made for reformation, or, if they were, they proved ineffectual: *The wounds have not been closed, nor bound up, nor mollified with ointment*. While sin remains unrepented of the wounds are unsearched, unwashed, the proud flesh in them not cut out, and while, consequently, it remains unpardoned, the wounds are not mollified or closed up, nor any thing done towards the healing of them and the preventing of their fatal consequences.

V. He sadly bewails the judgments of God which they had brought upon themselves by their sins, and their incorrigibleness under those judgments. 1. Their kingdom was almost ruined, v. 7. So miserable were they that both their towns and their lands were wasted, and yet so stupid that they needed to be told this, and to have it shown to them. "*Look and see how it is; your country is desolate*; the ground is not cultivated, for want of inhabitants, the villages being deserted, Judg. v. 7. And thus the fields and vineyards become like deserts, *all grown over with thorns*, Prov. xxiv. 31. *Your cities are burned with fire, by the enemies that invade you*" (fire and sword commonly go together); "*as for the fruits of your land, which should be food for your families, strangers decour them*; and, to your greater vexation, it is *before your eyes*, and you cannot prevent it; you starve while your enemies surfeit on that which should be your maintenance. The overthrow of your country is as the overthrow of strangers; it is used by the invaders, as one might expect it should be used by strangers." Jerusalem itself, which was as the daughter of Zion (the temple built on Zion was a mother, a nursing mother, to Jerusalem), or Zion itself, the holy mountain, which had been dear to God as a daughter, was now lost, deserted, and exposed *as a cottage in a vineyard*, which, when the vintage is over, nobody dwells in or takes any care of, and looks as mean and despicable as *a lodge, or hut, in a garden of cucumbers*; and every person is afraid of coming near it, and solicitous to remove his effects out of it, as if it were *a besieged city*, v. 8. And some think it is the calamitous state of the kingdom that is represented by a diseased body, v. 6. Probably this sermon was preached in the reign of Ahaz, when Judah was invaded by the kings of Syria and Israel, the Edomites and the Philistines, who slew many, and carried many away into captivity, 2 Chron. xxviii. 5, 17, 18. Note, National impiety and immorality bring national desolation. Canaan, the glory of all lands, Mount Zion, the joy



of the whole earth, both became a reproach and a ruin; and sin made them so, that great mischief-maker. 2. Yet they were not at all reformed, and therefore God threatens to take another course with them (v. 5): "*Why should you be stricken any more, with any expectation of doing you good by it, when you increase revolts as your rebukes are increased? You will revolt more and more, as you have done,*" as Ahaz particularly did, who, in his distress, trespassed yet more against the Lord, 2 Chron. xxviii. 22. Thus the physician, when he sees the patient's case desperate, troubles him no more with physic; and the father resolves to correct his child no more when, finding him hardened, he determines to disinherit him. Note, (1.) There are those who are made worse by the methods God takes to make them better; the more they are stricken the more they revolt; their corruptions, instead of being mortified, are irritated and exasperated by their afflictions, and their hearts more hardened. (2.) God sometimes, in a way of righteous judgment, ceases to correct those who have been long incorrigible, and whom therefore he designs to destroy. The reprobate silver shall be cast, not into the furnace, but to the dung-hill, Jer. vi. 29, 30. See Ezek. xxiv. 13; Hos. iv. 14. He that is filthy, let him be filthy still.

VI. He comforts himself with the consideration of a remnant that should be the monuments of divine grace and mercy, notwithstanding this general corruption and desolation, v. 9. See here, 1. How near they were to an utter extirpation. They were almost like Sodom and Gomorrah in respect both of sin and ruin, had grown almost so bad that there could not have been found *ten righteous men among them*, and almost as miserable as if none had been left alive, but their country turned into a sulphureous lake. Divine Justice said, *Make them as Admah; set them as Zeboim*; but Mercy said, *How shall I do it?* Hos. xi. 8, 9. 2. What it was that saved them from it: *The Lord of hosts left unto them a very small remnant*, that were kept pure from the common apostasy and kept safe and alive from the common calamity. This is quoted by the apostle (Rom. ix. 27), and applied to those few of the Jewish nation who in his time embraced Christianity, when the body of the people rejected it, and in whom the promises made to the fathers were accomplished. Note, (1.) In the worst of times there is a remnant preserved from iniquity and reserved for mercy, as Noah and his family in the deluge, Lot and his in the destruction of Sodom. Divine grace triumphs in distinguishing by an act of sovereignty. (2.) This remnant is often a very small one in comparison with the vast numbers of revolting ruined sinners. Multitude is no mark of the true church. Christ's is a little

flock. (3.) It is God's work to sanctify and save some, when others are left to perish in their impurity. It is the work of his power as the Lord of hosts. Except he had left us that remnant, there would have been none left; the corrupters (v. 4) did what they could to debauch all, and the devourers (v. 7) to destroy all, and they would have prevailed if God himself had not interposed to secure to himself a remnant, who are bound to give him all the glory. (4.) It is good for a people that have been saved from utter ruin to look back and see how near they were to it, just upon the brink of it, to see how much they owed to a few good men that stood in the gap, and that that was owing to a good God, who left them these good men. *It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed.*

10 Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. 11 To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. 12 When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? 13 Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; *it is iniquity*, even the solemn meeting. 14 Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. 15 And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.

Here, I. God calls to them (but calls in vain) to hear his word, v. 10. 1. The title he gives them is very strange: *You rulers of Sodom, and people of Gomorrah*. This intimates what a righteous thing it would have been with God to make them like Sodom and Gomorrah in respect of ruin (v. 9), because they had made themselves like Sodom and Gomorrah in respect of sin. The men of Sodom were wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly (Gen. xiii. 13), and so were the men of Judah. When the rulers were bad, no wonder the people were so. Vice overpowered virtue, for it had the rulers, the men of figure, on its side; and it out-pollied it, for it had the people, the men of number, on its side. The streams

being thus strong, no less a power than that of the Lord of hosts could secure a remnant, v. 9. The rulers are boldly attacked here by the prophet as rulers of Sodom; for he knew not how to give flattering titles. The tradition of the Jews is that for this he was impeached long after, and put to death, as having cursed the gods and *spoken evil of the ruler of his people*. 2. His demand upon them is very reasonable: "*Hear the word of the Lord, and give ear to the law of our God; attend to that which God has to say to you, and let his word be a law to you.*" The following declaration of dislike to their sacrifices would be a kind of new law to them, though really it was but an explication of the old law; but special regard is to be had to it, as is required to the like, Ps. 1. 7, 8. "*Hear this, and tremble; hear it, and take warning.*"

II. He justly refuses to hear their prayers and accept their services, their sacrifices and burnt-offerings, the fat and blood of them (v. 11), their attendance in his courts (v. 12), their oblations, their incense, and their solemn assemblies (v. 13), their new moons and their appointed feasts (v. 14), their devoutest addresses (v. 15); they are all rejected, because their hands were full of blood. Now observe,

1. There are many who are strangers, nay, enemies, to the power of religion, and yet seem very zealous for the show and shadow and form of it. This sinful nation, this seed of evil-doers, these rulers of Sodom and people of Gomorrah, brought, not to the altars of false gods (they are not here charged with that), but to the altar of the God of Israel, sacrifices, a multitude of them, as many as the law required and rather more—not only peace-offerings, which they themselves had their share of, but burnt-offerings, which were wholly consumed to the honour of God; nor did they bring the torn, and lame, and sick, but fed beasts, and the fat of them, the best of the kind. They did not send others to offer their sacrifices for them, but came themselves to appear before God. They observed the instituted *places* (not in high places or groves, but in God's own courts), and the instituted *time*, the new moons, and sabbaths, and appointed feasts, none of which they omitted. Nay, it should seem, they called extraordinary assemblies, and held solemn meetings for religious worship, besides those that God had appointed. Yet this was not all: they applied to God, not only with their ceremonial observances, but with the exercises of devotion. They prayed, prayed often, made many prayers, thinking they should be heard for their much speaking; nay, they were fervent and importunate in prayer, they spread forth their hands as men in earnest. Now we should have thought these, and, no doubt, they thought themselves, a pious religious people; and

yet they were far from being so, for (1.) Their hearts were empty of true devotion. They came to *appear* before God (v. 12), *to be seen* before him (so the margin reads it); they rested in the outside of the duties; they looked no further than to be seen of men, and went no further than that which men see. (2.) Their hands were full of blood. They were guilty of murder, rapine, and oppression, under colour of law and justice. The people shed blood, and the rulers did not punish them for it; the rulers shed blood, and the people were aiding and abetting, as the elders of Jezreel were to Jezebel in shedding Naboth's blood. Malice is heart-murder in the account of God; he that hates his brother in his heart has, in effect, his hands full of blood.

2. When sinners are under the judgments of God they will more easily be brought to fly to their devotions than to forsake their sins and reform their lives. Their country was now desolate, and their cities were burnt (v. 7), which awakened them to bring their sacrifices and offerings to God more constantly than they had done, as if they would bribe God Almighty to remove the punishment and give them leave to go on in the sin. *When he slew them, then they sought him*, Ps. lxxviii. 34. *Lord, in trouble have they visited thee*, ch. xxvi. 16. Many that will readily part with their sacrifices will not be persuaded to part with their sins.

3. The most pompous and costly devotions of wicked people, without a thorough reformation of the heart and life, are so far from being acceptable to God that really they are an abomination to him. It is here shown in a great variety of expressions that *to obey is better than sacrifice*; nay, that sacrifice, without obedience, is a jest, an affront and provocation to God. The comparative neglect which God here expresses of ceremonial observances was a tacit intimation of what they would come to at last, when they would all be done away by the death of Christ. What was now made little of would in due time be made nothing of. "*Sacrifice and offering, and prayer made in the virtue of them, thou wouldest not; then said I, Lo, I come.*" Their sacrifices are here represented,

(1.) As fruitless and insignificant: *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices?* v. 11. They are *vain oblations*, v. 13. *In vain do they worship me*, Matt. xv. 9. Their attention to God's institutions was all lost labour, and served not to answer any good intention; for, [1.] It was not looked upon as any act of duty or obedience to God; *Who has required these things at your hands?* v. 12. Not that God disowns his institutions, or refuses to stand by his own warrants; but in what they did they had not an eye to him that required it, nor indeed did he require it of those whose hands were full of blood and who continued impe-



nitent. [2.] It did not recommend them to God's favour. He delighted not in the blood of their sacrifices, for he did not look upon himself as honoured by it. [3.] It would not obtain any relief for them. They pray, but God will not hear, because they regard iniquity (Ps. lxi. 18); he will not deliver them, for, though they make many prayers, none of them come from an upright heart. All their religious services turned to no account to them. Nay,

(2.) As odious and offensive. God did not only not accept them, but he did detest and abhor them. "They are your sacrifices, they are none of mine; I am full of them, even surfeited with them." He needed them not (Ps. l. 10), did not desire them, had had enough of them, and more than enough. Their coming into his courts he calls *treading them*, or trampling upon them; their very attendance on his ordinances was construed into a contempt of them. Their incense, though ever so fragrant, was an abomination to him, for it was burnt in hypocrisy and with an ill design. Their solemn assemblies he could not *away with*, could not see them with any patience, nor bear the affront they gave him. *The solemn meeting is iniquity*; though the thing itself was not, yet, as they managed it, it became so. It is a *revocation* (so some read it), a provocation, to God, to have ordinances thus prostituted, not only by wicked people, but to wicked purposes: "*My soul hates them; they are a trouble to me, a burden, an incumbrance; I am perfectly sick of them, and weary of bearing them.*" God is never weary of hearing the prayers of the upright, but soon weary of the costly sacrifices of the wicked. He hides his eyes from their prayers, as that which he has an aversion to and is angry at. All this is to show, [1.] That sin is very hateful to God, so hateful that it makes even men's prayers and their religious services hateful to him. [2.] That dissembled piety is double iniquity. Hypocrisy in religion is of all things most abominable to the God of heaven. Jerome applies the passage to the Jews in Christ's time, who pretended a great zeal for the law and the temple, but made themselves and all their services abominable to God by filling their hands with the blood of Christ and his apostles, and so filling up the measure of their iniquities.

16 Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; 17 Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. 18 Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as

white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. 19 If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: 20 But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

Though God had rejected their services as insufficient to atone for their sins while they persisted in them, yet he does not reject them as in a hopeless condition, but here calls upon them to forsake their sins, which hindered the acceptance of their services, and then all would be well. Let them not say that God picked quarrels with them; no, he proposes a method of reconciliation. Observe here,

I. A call to repentance and reformation: "If you would have your sacrifices accepted, and your prayers answered, you must begin your work at the right end: *Be converted to my law*" (so the Chaldee begins this exhortation), "make conscience of second-table duties, else expect not to be accepted in the acts of your devotion." As justice and charity will never atone for atheism and profaneness, so prayers and sacrifices will never atone for fraud and oppression; for righteousness towards men is as much a branch of pure religion as religion towards God is a branch of universal righteousness.

1. They must *cease to do evil*, must do no more wrong, shed no more innocent blood. This is the meaning of washing themselves and *making themselves clean*, v. 16. It is not only sorrowing for the sin they had committed, but breaking off the practice of it for the future, and mortifying all those vicious affections and dispositions which inclined them to it. Sin is defiling to the soul. Our business is to wash ourselves from it by repenting of it and turning from it to God. We must put away not only that evil of our doings which is before the eye of the world, by refraining from the gross acts of sin, but that which is before God's eyes, the roots and habits of sin, that are in our hearts; these must be crushed and mortified.

2. They must *learn to do well*. This was necessary to the completing of their repentance. Note, It is not enough that we cease to do evil, but we must learn to do well. (1.) We must be doing, not cease to do evil and then stand idle. (2.) We must be doing good, the good which the Lord our God requires and which will turn to a good account. (3.) We must do it well, in a right manner and for a right end; and, (4.) We must learn to do well; we must take pains to get the knowledge of our duty, be inquisitive concerning it, in care about it, and accustom ourselves to it, that we may readily turn our hands to our work and be-



come masters of this holy art of doing well. He urges them particularly to those instances of well-doing wherein they had been defective, to second-table duties: "*Seek judgment*; enquire what is right, that you may do it; be solicitous to be found in the way of your duty, and do not walk carelessly. Seek opportunities of doing good: *Relieve the oppressed*, those whom you yourselves have oppressed; ease them of their burdens, *ch. lviii. 6.* You, that have power in your hands, use it for the relief of those whom others do oppress, for that is your business. Avenge those that suffer wrong, in a special manner concerning yourselves for the fatherless and the widow, whom, because they are weak and helpless, proud men trample upon and abuse; do you appear for them at the bar, on the bench, as there is occasion. Speak for those that know not how to speak for themselves and that have not wherewithal to gratify you for your kindness." Note, We are truly honouring God when we are doing good in the world; and acts of justice and charity are more pleasing to him than all burnt-offerings and sacrifices.

II. A demonstration, at the bar of right reason, of the equity of God's proceedings with them: "*Come now, and let us reason together (v. 18)*; while your hands are full of blood I will have nothing to do with you, though you bring me a multitude of sacrifices; but if you wash, and make yourselves clean, you are welcome to draw nigh to me; come now, and let us talk the matter over." Note, Those, and those only, that break off their league with sin, shall be welcome into covenant and communion with God; he says, *Come now*, who before forbade them his courts. See *Jam. iv. 8.* Or rather thus: There were those among them who looked upon themselves as affronted by the slights God put upon the multitude of their sacrifices, as *ch. lviii. 3, Wherefore have we fasted (say they) and thou seest not?* They represented God as a hard Master, whom it was impossible to please. "Come," says God, "let us debate the matter fairly, and I doubt not but to make it out that *my ways are equal, but yours are unequal,*" *Ezek. xviii. 25.* Note, Religion has reason on its side; there is all the reason in the world why we should do as God would have us do. The God of heaven condescends to reason the case with those that contradict him and find fault with his proceedings; for *he will be justified when he speaks*, *Ps. li. 4.* The case needs only to be stated (as it is here very fairly) and it will determine itself. God shows here upon what terms they stood (as he does, *Ezek. xviii. 21—24; xxxiii. 18, 19*) and then leaves it to them to judge whether these terms are not fair and reasonable.

1. They could not in reason expect any more than that, if they repented and reformed, they should be restored to God's favour,

notwithstanding their former provocations. "This you may expect," says God, and it is very kind; who could have the face to desire it upon any other terms? (1.) It is very little that is required, "only that you be willing and obedient, that you consent to obey" (so some read it), "that you subject your wills to the will of God, acquiesce in that, and give up yourselves in all things to be ruled by him who is infinitely wise and good." Here is no penance imposed for their former stubbornness, nor the yoke made heavier or bound harder on their necks; only, "Whereas hitherto you have been perverse and refractory, and would not comply with that which was for your own good, now be tractable, be governable." He does not say, "If you be perfectly obedient," but, "If you be willingly so;" for, if there be a willing mind, it is accepted. (2.) That is very great which is promised hereupon. [1.] That all their sins should be pardoned to them, and should not be mentioned against them. "Though they be as red as scarlet and crimson, though you lie under the guilt of blood, yet, upon your repentance, even that shall be forgiven you, and you shall appear in the sight of God as white as snow." Note, The greatest sinners, if they truly repent, shall have their sins forgiven them, and so have their consciences pacified and purified. Though our sins have been as scarlet and crimson, a deep dye, a double dye, first in the wool of original corruption and afterwards in the many threads of actual transgression—though we have been often dipped, by our many backslidings, into sin, and though we have lain long soaking in it, as the cloth does in the scarlet dye, yet pardoning mercy will thoroughly discharge the stain, and, being by it purged as with hyssop, we shall be clean, *Ps. li. 7.* If we make ourselves clean by repentance and reformation (*v. 16*), God will make us white by a full remission. [2.] That they should have all the happiness and comfort they could desire. "Be but willing and obedient, and you shall eat the good of the land, the land of promise; you shall have all the blessings of the new covenant, of the heavenly Canaan, all the good of that land." Those that go on in sin, though they dwell in a good land, cannot with any comfort eat the good of it; guilt embitters all; but, if sin be pardoned, creature-comforts become comforts indeed.

2. They could not in reason expect any other than that, if they continued obstinate in their disobedience, they should be abandoned to ruin, and the sentence of the law should be executed upon them; what can be more just? (*v. 20*): "*If you refuse and rebel*, if you continue to rebel against the divine government and refuse the offers of divine grace, *you shall be devoured with the sword*, with the sword of your enemies, which shall be commissioned to destroy you

—with the sword of God's justice, his wrath, and vengeance, which shall be drawn against you; for this is that which *the mouth of the Lord has spoken*, and which he will make good, for the maintaining of his own honour." Note, Those that will not be governed by God's sceptre will certainly and justly be devoured by his sword.

"And now life and death, good and evil, are thus set before you. *Come, and let us reason together.* What have you to object against the equity of this, or against complying with God's terms?"

21 How is the faithful city become an harlot! It was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers. 22 Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water: 23 Thy princes *are* rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them. 24 Therefore saith the LORD, the LORD of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies: 25 And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin: 26 And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city. 27 Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness. 28 And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners *shall be* together, and they that forsake the LORD shall be consumed. 29 For they shall be ashamed of the oaks which ye have desired, and ye shall be confounded for the gardens that ye have chosen. 30 For ye shall be as an oak whose leaf fadeth, and as a garden that hath no water. 31 And the strong shall be as tow, and the maker of it as a spark, and they shall both burn together, and none shall quench them.

Here, I. The woeful degeneracy of Judah and Jerusalem is sadly lamented. See, 1. What the royal city had been, a faithful city, faithful to God and the interests of his kingdom among men, faithful to the nation and its public interests. *It was full*

*of judgment*: justice was duly administered upon the thrones of judgment which were set there, the *thrones of the house of David*, Ps. cxii. 5. Men were generally honest in their dealings, and abhorred to do an unjust thing. *Righteousness lodged in it*, was constantly resident in their palaces and in all their dwellings, not called in now and then to serve a turn, but at home there. Note, Neither holy cities nor royal ones, neither places where religion is professed nor places where government is administered, are faithful to their trust if religion do not dwell in them. 2. What it had now become. That beauteous virtuous spouse was now debauched, and become an adulteress; righteousness no longer dwelt in Jerusalem (*terras Astræa reliquit—Astræa left the earth*); even murderers were unpunished and lived undisturbed there; nay, the princes themselves were so cruel and oppressive that they had become no better than murderers; an innocent man might better guard himself against a troop of banditti or assassins than against a bench of such judges. Note, It is a great aggravation of the wickedness of any family or people that their ancestors were famed for virtue and probity; and commonly those that thus degenerate prove the most wicked of all men. *Corruptio optimi est pessima—That which was originally the best becomes when corrupted the worst*, Luke xi. 26; Eccl. iii. 16; See Jer. xxii. 15—17. The degeneracy of Jerusalem is illustrated, (1.) By similitudes (v. 22): *Thy silver has become dross*. This degeneracy of the magistrates, whose character is the reverse of that of their predecessors, is as great a reproach and injury to the kingdom as the debasing of their coin would be and the turning of their silver into dross. Righteous princes and righteous cities are as silver for the treasury, but unrighteous ones are as dross for the dunghill. *How has the gold become dim!* Lam. iv. 1. *Thy wine is mixed with water*, and so has become flat and sour. Some understand both these literally: the wine they sold was adulterated, it was half water; the money they paid was counterfeit, and so they cheated all they dealt with. But it is rather to be taken figuratively: justice was perverted by their princes, and religion and the word of God were sophisticated by their priests, and made to serve what turn they pleased. Dross may shine like silver, and the wine that is mixed with water may retain the colour of wine, but neither is worth any thing. Thus they retained a show and pretence of virtue and justice, but had no true sense of either. (2.) By some instances (v. 23): "Thy princes, that should keep others in their allegiance to God and subjection to his law, are themselves rebellious, and set God and his law at defiance. Those that should restrain thieves (proud and rich oppressors, those worst of robbers, and those that designedly cheat their creditors, who are no better), are themselves



companions of thieves, connive at them, do as they do, and with greater security and success, because they are princes, and have power in their hands; they share with the thieves they protect in their unlawful gain (Ps. l. 18) and *cast in their lot among them*, Prov. i. 13, 14. [1.] The profit of their places is all their aim, to make the best hand they can of them, right or wrong. They love gifts, and follow after rewards; they set their hearts upon their salary, the fees and perquisites of their offices, and are greedy of them, and never think they can get enough; nay, they will do any thing, though ever so contrary to law and justice, for a gift in secret. Presents and gratuities will blind their eyes at any time, and make them pervert judgment. These they love and are eager in the pursuit of, Hos. iv. 18. [2.] The duty of their places is none of their care. They ought to protect those that are injured, and take cognizance of the appeals made to them; why else were they preferred? But *they judge not the fatherless*, take no care to guard the orphans, *nor does the cause of the widow come unto them*, because the poor widow has no bribe to give, with which to make way for her and to bring her cause on." Those will have a great deal to answer for who, when they should be the patrons of the oppressed, are their greatest oppressors.

II. A resolution is taken up to redress these grievances (v. 24): *Therefore saith the Lord, the Lord of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel*—who has power to make good what he says, who has hosts at command for the executing of his purposes, and whose power is engaged for his Israel—*Ah! I will ease me of my adversaries*. Observe,

1. Wicked people, especially wicked rulers that are cruel and oppressive, are God's enemies, his adversaries, and shall so be accounted and so dealt with. If the holy seed corrupt themselves, they are the foes of his own house.

2. They are a burden to the God of heaven, which is implied in his easing himself of them. The *Mighty One of Israel*, that can bear any thing, nay, that upholds all things, complains of his being *wearied with men's iniquities*, ch. xliii. 24. Amos ii. 13.

3. God will find out a time and a way to ease himself of this burden, by avenging himself on those that thus bear hard upon his patience. He here speaks as one triumphing in the foresight of it: *Ah! I will ease me*. He will ease the earth of the burden under which it *groans* (Rom. viii. 21, 22), will ease his own name of the reproaches with which it is loaded. He will be eased of his adversaries, by *taking vengeance on his enemies*; he will *spue them out of his mouth*, and so be eased of them, Rev. iii. 16. He speaks with pleasure of the *day of vengeance being in his heart*, ch. lxiii.

4. If God's professing people conform not

to his image, as the Holy One of Israel (v. 4), they shall feel the weight of his hard as the Mighty One of Israel: his power, which was wont to be engaged for them, shall be armed against them. In two ways God will ease himself of this grievance:—

(1.) By reforming his church, and restoring good judges in the room of those corrupt ones. Though the church has a great deal of dross in it, yet it shall not be thrown away, but refined (v. 25): "*I will purely purge away thy dross*. I will amend what is amiss. Vice and profaneness shall be suppressed and put out of countenance, oppressors displaced and deprived of their power to do mischief." When things are ever so bad God can set them to rights, and bring about a complete reformation; when he begins he will make an end, will take away all the tin. Observe, [1.] The reformation of a people is God's own work, and, if ever it be done, it is he that brings it about: "*I will turn my hand upon thee*; I will do that for the reviving of religion which I did at first for the planting of it." He can do it easily, with the turn of his hand; but he does it effectually, for what opposition can stand before the arm of the Lord revealed? [2.] He does it by blessing them with good magistrates and good ministers of state (v. 26): "*I will restore thy judges as at the first*, to put the laws in execution against evil-doers, and thy counsellors, to transact public affairs, as at the beginning," either the same persons that had been turned out or others of the same character. [3.] He does it by restoring judgment and righteousness among them (v. 27), by planting in men's minds principles of justice and governing their lives by those principles. Men may do much by external restraints; but God does it effectually by the influences of *his Spirit*, as a *Spirit of judgment*, ch. iv. 4; xxviii. 6. See Ps. lxxxv. 10, 11. [4.] The reformation of a people will be the redemption of them and their converts, for sin is the worst captivity, the worst slavery, and the great and eternal redemption is that by which *Israel is redeemed from all his iniquities* (Ps. cxxx. 8), and the *blessed Redeemer* is he that *turns away ungodliness from Jacob* (Rom. xi. 26), and *saves his people from their sins*, Matt. i. 21. All the redeemed of the Lord shall be converts, and their conversion is their redemption: "*Her converts, or those that return of her* (so the margin), *shall be redeemed with righteousness*." God works deliverance for us by preparing us for it with judgment and righteousness. [5.] The reviving of a people's virtue is the restoring of their honour: *Afterwards thou shalt be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city*; that is, *First*, "*Thou shalt be so*;" the reforming of the magistracy is a good step towards the reforming of the city and the country too. Secondly, "*Thou shalt have the praise of*



being so ;" and a greater praise there cannot be to any city than to be called the city of righteousness, and to retrieve the ancient honour which was lost when the faithful city became a harlot, v. 21.

(2.) By cutting off those that hate to be reformed, that they may not remain either as snares or as scandals to the faithful city. [1.] It is an utter ruin that is here threatened. They shall be destroyed and consumed, and not chastened and corrected only. The extirpation of them will be necessary to the redemption of Zion. [2.] It is a universal ruin, which will involve the transgressors and the sinners together, that is, the openly profane that have quite cast off all religion, and the hypocrites that live wicked lives under the cloak of a religious profession—they shall both be destroyed together, for they are both alike an abomination to God, both those that contradict religion and those that contradict themselves in their pretensions to it. And those that forsake the Lord, to whom they had formerly joined themselves, shall be consumed, as the water in the conduit-pipe is soon consumed when it is cut off from the fountain. [3.] It is an inevitable ruin ; there is no escaping it. First, Their idols shall not be able to help them, the oaks which they have desired, and the gardens which they have chosen ; that is, the images, the dunghill-gods, which they have worshipped in their groves and under the green trees, which they were fond of and wedded to, for which they forsook the true God, and which they worshipped privately in their own gardens even when idolatry was publicly discountenanced. "This was the practice of the transgressors and the sinners ; but they shall be ashamed of it, not with a show of repentance, but of despair, v. 29. They shall have cause to be ashamed of their idols ; for, after all the court they have made to them, they shall find no benefit by them ; but the idols themselves shall go into captivity," ch. xli. 1, 2. Note, Those that make creatures their confidence are but preparing confusion for themselves. "You were fond of the oaks and the gardens ; but you yourselves shall be, 1. *"Like an oak without leaves,* withered and blasted, and stripped of all its ornaments." Justly do those wear no leaves that bear no fruit ; as the fig-tree that Christ cursed. 2. *"Like a garden without water,* that is neither rained upon nor watered with the foot (Deut. xi. 10), that has no fountain (Cant. iv. 15), and consequently is parched, and all the fruits of it gone to decay." Thus shall those be that trust in idols, or in an arm of flesh, Jer. xvii. 5, 6. But those that trust in God never find him as a wilderness, or as waters that fail, Jer. ii. 31. Secondly, They shall not be able to help themselves (v. 31) : *"Even the strong man shall be as tow,* not only soon broken and pulled to pieces, but easily catching fire ;

and his work (so the margin reads it), that by which he hopes to fortify and secure himself, shall be as a spark to his own tow, shall set him on fire, and he and his work shall burn together. His own counsels shall be his ruin ; his own sin kindles the fire of God's wrath, which shall burn to the lowest hell, and none shall quench it." When the sinner has made himself as tow and stubble, and God makes himself to him as a consuming fire, what can prevent the utter ruin of the sinner ?

Now all this is applicable, 1. To the blessed work of reformation which was wrought in Hezekiah's time after the abominable corruptions of the reign of Ahaz. Then good men came to be preferred, and the faces of the wicked were filled with shame. 2. To their return out of their captivity in Babylon, which had thoroughly cured them of idolatry. 3. To the gospel-kingdom and the pouring out of the Spirit, by which the New-Testament church should be made a new Jerusalem, a city of righteousness. 4. To the second coming of Christ, when he shall thoroughly purge his floor, his field, shall gather the wheat into his barn, into his garner, and burn the chaff, the tares, with unquenchable fire.

## CHAP. II.

With this chapter begins a new sermon, which is continued in the two following chapters. The subject of this discourse is Judah and Jerusalem, ver. 1. In this chapter the prophet speaks, 1. Of the glory of the Christians, Jerusalem, the gospel-church in the latter days, in the accession of many to it (ver. 2, 3), and the great peace it should introduce into the world (ver. 4), whence he infers the duty of the house of Jacob, ver. 5. II. Of the shame of the Jews, Jerusalem, as it then was, and as it would be after its rejection of the gospel and being rejected of God. 1. Their sin was their shame, ver. 6—9. 2. God by his judgments would humble them and put them to shame, ver. 10—17. 3. They should themselves be ashamed of their confidence in their idols and in an arm of flesh, ver. 18—22. And now which of these Jerusalems will we be the inhabitants of—that which is full of the knowledge of God, which will be our everlasting honour, or that which is full of horses and chariots, and silver and gold, and such idols, which will in the end be our shame ?

THE word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 2 And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills ; and all nations shall flow unto it. 3 And many people shall go up and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob ; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths : for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. 4 And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people : and they shall beat their swords

into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. 5 O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the LORD.

The particular title of this sermon (v. 1) is the same with the general title of the book (*ch. i. 1*), only that what is there called the *vision* is here called the *word which Isaiah saw* (or the matter, or thing, which he saw), the truth of which he had as full an assurance of in his own mind as if he had seen it with his bodily eyes. Or this word was brought to him in a vision; something he saw when he received this message from God. John turned to *see the voice* that spoke with him. Rev. i. 12.

This sermon begins with the prophecy relating to the last days, the days of the Messiah, when his kingdom should be set up in the world, at the latter end of the Mosaic economy. In the last days of the earthly Jerusalem, just before the destruction of it, this heavenly Jerusalem should be erected, Heb. xii. 22; Gal. iv. 26. Note, Gospel times are the last days. For, 1. They were long in coming, were a great while waited for by the Old-Testament saints, and came at last. 2. We are not to look for any dispensation of divine grace but what we have in the gospel, Gal. i. 8, 9. 3. We are to look for the second coming of Jesus Christ at the end of time, as the Old-Testament saints did for his first coming; *this is the last time*, 1 John ii. 18.

Now the prophet here foretels,

I. The setting up of the Christian church, and the planting of the Christian religion, in the world. Christianity shall then be the mountain of the Lord's house; where that is professed God will grant his presence, receive his people's homage, and grant instruction and blessing, as he did of old in the temple on Mount Zion. The gospel church, incorporated by Christ's charter, shall then be the rendezvous of all the spiritual seed of Abraham. Now it is here promised, 1. That Christianity shall be openly preached and professed; it shall be *prepared* (so the margin reads it) in the top of the mountains, in the view and hearing of all. Hence Christ's disciples are compared to a city on a hill, which *cannot be hid*, Matt. v. 14. They had many eyes upon them. Christ himself *spoke openly to the world*, John xviii. 20. What the apostles did was not *done in a corner*, Acts xxvi. 26. It was the lighting of a beacon, the setting up of a standard. Its being every where spoken *against* supposes that it was every where spoken *of*. 2. That it shall be firmly fixed and rooted; it shall be established on the top of the everlasting mountains, built upon a rock, so that the *gates of hell shall not pre-*

*vail against it*, unless they could pluck up mountains by the roots. He that dwells safely is said to *dwell on high*, *ch. xxxiii. 16*. *The Lord has founded the gospel Zion. 3.* That it shall not only overcome all opposition, but overtop all competition; it shall be *exalted above the hills*. *This wisdom of God in a mystery shall outshine all the wisdom of this world, all its philosophy and all its politics.* The spiritual worship which it shall introduce shall put down the idolatries of the heathen; and all other institutions in religion shall appear mean and despicable in comparison with this. See Ps. lxxviii. 16. *Why leap ye, ye high hills? This is the hill which God desires to dwell in.*

II. The bringing of the Gentiles into it.

1. The nations shall be admitted into it, even the uncircumcised, who were forbidden to come into the courts of the temple at Jerusalem. The partition wall, which kept them out, kept them off, shall be taken down. 2. *All nations shall flow into it*; having liberty of access, they shall improve their liberty, and multitudes shall embrace the Christian faith. They shall flow into it, as streams of water, which denotes the abundance of converts that the gospel should make and their speed and cheerfulness in coming into the church. They shall not be forced into it, but shall naturally flow into it. *Thy people shall be willing*, all volunteers, Ps. cx. 3. To Christ shall the *gathering of the people be*, Gen. xlix. 10. See *ch. lx. 4, 5*.

III. The mutual assistance and encouragement which this confluence of converts shall give to one another. Their pious affections and resolutions shall be so intermixed that they shall come in in one full stream. As, when the Jews from all parts of the country went up thrice a year to worship at Jerusalem, they called on their friends in the road and excited them to go along with them, so shall many of the Gentiles court their relations, friends, and neighbours, to join with them in embracing the Christian religion (v. 3): "*Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord*; though it be uphill and against heart, yet it is *the mountain of the Lord*, who will assist the ascent of our souls towards him." Note, Those that are entering into covenant and communion with God themselves should bring as many as they can along with them; it becomes Christians to provoke one another to good works, and to further the communion of saints by inviting one another into it: not, "*Do you go up to the mountain of the Lord, and pray for us, and we will stay at home*;" nor, "*We will go, and do you do as you will*;" but, "*Come, and let us go, let us go in concert, that we may strengthen one another's hands and support one another's reputation*;" not, "*We will consider of it, and advise about it, and go hereafter*;" but, "*Come, and let us go forthwith*." See Ps.



exxii. 1. Many shall say this. Those that have had it said to them shall say it to others. The gospel church is here called, not only *the mountain of the Lord*, but *the house of the God of Jacob*; for in it God's covenant with Jacob and his praying seed is kept up and has its accomplishment; for to us now, as unto them, he never said, *Seek you me in vain*, ch. xlv. 19. Now see here, 1. What they promise themselves in going up to the *mountain of the Lord*: There *he will teach us of his ways*. Note, God's ways are to be learned in his church, in communion with his people, and in the use of instituted ordinances—the ways of duty which he requires us to walk in, the ways of grace in which he walks towards us. It is God that teaches his people, by his word and Spirit. It is worth while to take pains to go up to his holy mountain to be taught his ways, and those who are willing to take that pains shall never find it labour in vain. Then *shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord*. 2. What they promise for themselves and one another: "If he will teach us his ways, we will walk in his paths; if he will let us know our duty, we will by his grace make conscience of doing it." Those who attend God's word with this humble resolution shall not be sent away without their lesson.

IV. The means by which this shall be brought about: *Out of Zion shall go forth the law*, the New-Testament law, the law of Christ, as of old the law of Moses from Mount Sinai, even *the word of the Lord from Jerusalem*. The gospel is a law, a law of faith; it is *the word of the Lord*; it *went forth from Zion*, where the temple was built, and from Jerusalem. Christ himself began in Galilee, Matt. iv. 23; Luke xxiii. 5. But, when he commissioned his apostles to preach the gospel to all nations, he appointed them to begin at Jerusalem, Luke xxiv. 47. See Rom. xv. 19. Though most of them had their home in Galilee, yet they must stay at Jerusalem, there to receive *the promise of the Spirit*, Acts i. 4. And in the temple on Mount Zion they preached the gospel, Acts v. 20. This honour was allowed to Jerusalem, even after Christ was crucified there, for the sake of what it had been. And it was by this gospel, which took rise from Jerusalem, that the gospel church was *established on the top of the mountains*. This was the rod of divine strength, that was *sent forth out of Zion*, Ps. cx. 2.

V. The erecting of the kingdom of the Redeemer in the world: *He shall judge among the nations*. He whose word goes forth out of Zion shall by that word not only subdue souls to himself, but rule in them, v. 4. He shall, in wisdom and justice, order and overrule the affairs of the world for the good of his church, and rebuke and restrain those that oppose his interest. By his Spirit working on men's consciences he

shall judge, and rebuke shall try men and check them; his kingdom is spiritual, and *not of this world*.

VI. The great peace which should be the effect of the success of the gospel in the world (v. 4): *They shall beat their swords into ploughshares*; their instruments of war shall be converted into implements of husbandry; as, on the contrary, when war is proclaimed, *ploughshares are beaten into swords*, Joel iii. 10. *Nation shall then not lift up sword against nation*, as now they do, *neither shall they learn war any more*, for they shall have no more occasion for it. This does not make all war absolutely unlawful among Christians, nor is it a prophecy that in the days of the Messiah there shall be no wars. The Jews urge this against Christians as an argument that Jesus is not the Messiah, because this promise is not fulfilled. But, 1. It was in part fulfilled in the peaceableness of the time in which Christ was born, when wars had in a great measure ceased, witness *the taxing*, Luke ii. 1. 2. The design and tendency of the gospel are to make peace and to slay all enmities. It has in it the most powerful obligations and inducements to peace; so that one might reasonably have expected it should have this effect, and it would have had it if it had not been for those lusts of men from which come wars and fightings. 3. Jews and Gentiles were reconciled and brought together by the gospel, and there were no more such wars between them as there had been; for they became *one sheepfold under one shepherd*. See Eph. ii. 15. 4. The gospel of Christ, as far as it prevails, disposes men to be peaceable, softens men's spirits, and sweetens them; and the love of Christ, shed abroad in the heart, constrains men to love one another. 5. The primitive Christians were famous for brotherly love; their very adversaries took notice of it. 6. We have reason to hope that this promise shall yet have a more full accomplishment in the latter times of the Christian church, when the Spirit shall be poured out more plentifully from on high. Then there shall be on earth peace. *Who shall live when God doeth this?* But do it he will in due time, for *he is not a man that he should lie*.

Lastly, Here is a practical inference drawn from all this (v. 5): *O house of Jacob! come you, and let us walk in the light of the Lord*. By the house of Jacob is meant either, 1. Israel according to the flesh. Let them be provoked by this to a holy emulation, Rom. xi. 14. "Seeing the Gentiles are thus ready and resolved for God, thus forward to go up to the house of the Lord, let us stir up ourselves to go too. Let it never be said that the sinners of the Gentiles were better friends to the holy mountain than the house of Jacob." Thus the zeal of some should provoke many. Or, 2. Spiritual Israel, all that are brought to the God of Jacob



Shall there be such great knowledge in gospel times (v. 3) and such great peace (v. 4), and shall we share in these privileges? Come then, and let us live accordingly. Whatever others do, *come, O come!* let us *walk in the light of the Lord*. (1.) Let us walk circumspectly in the light of this knowledge. Will God teach us his ways? Will he show us his glory in the face of Christ? Let us then *walk as the children of the light and of the day*, Eph. v. 8; 1 Thess. v. 8; Rom. xiii. 12. (2.) Let us walk comfortably in the light of this peace. Shall there be no more war? Let us then go on our way rejoicing, and let this joy terminate in God, and be our strength, Neh. viii. 10. Thus shall we walk in the beams of the Sun of righteousness.

6 Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people the house of Jacob, because they be replenished from the east, and *are* soothsayers like the Philistines, and they please themselves in the children of strangers. 7 Their land also is full of silver and gold, neither *is there any* end of their treasures; their land is also full of horses, neither *is there any* end of their chariots: 8 Their land also is full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made: 9 And the mean man boweth down, and the great man humbleth himself: therefore forgive them not.

The calling in of the Gentiles was accompanied with the rejection of the Jews; it was their fall, and the *diminishing of them, that was the riches of the Gentiles*; and the *casting off of them was the reconciling of the world* (Rom. xi. 12—15); and it should seem that these verses have reference to that, and are designed to justify God therein, and yet it is probable that they are primarily intended for the convincing and awakening of the men of that generation in which the prophet lived, it being usual with the prophets to speak of the things that then were, both in mercy and judgment, as types of the things that should be hereafter. Here is,

I. Israel's doom. This is set forth in two words, the first and the last of this paragraph; but they are two dreadful words, and which speak, 1. Their case sad, very sad (v. 6): *Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people*. Miserable is the condition of that people whom God has forsaken, and great certainly must the provocation be if he forsake those that have been his own people. This was the deplorable case of the Jewish church after they had rejected Christ. *Migremus hinc—Let us go hence. Your house is left unto*

*you desolate*, Matt. xxiii. 38. Whenever any sore calamity came upon the Jews thus far the Lord might be said to forsake them that he withdrew his help and succour from them, else they would not have fallen into the hands of their enemies. But God never leaves any till they first leave him. 2. Their case desperate, wholly desperate (v. 9): *Therefore forgive them not*. This prophetic prayer amounts to a threatening that they should not be forgiven, and so some think it may be read: *And thou wilt not forgive them*. This refers not to particular persons (many of them repented and were pardoned), but to the body of that nation, against whom an irreversible doom was passed, that they should be wholly cut off and their church quite dismantled, never to be formed into such a body again, nor ever to have their old charter restored to them.

II. Israel's desert of this doom, and the reasons upon which it is grounded. In general, it is sin that brings destruction upon them; it is this, and nothing but this, that provokes God to forsake his people. The particular sins which the prophet specifies are such as abounded among them at that time, which he makes mention of for the conviction of those to whom he then preached, rather than that which afterwards proved the measure-filling sin, their crucifying Christ and persecuting his followers; for the sins of every age contributed towards the making up of the dreadful account at last. And there was a partial and temporary rejection of them by the captivity in Babylon hastening on, which was a type of their final destruction by the Romans, and which the sins here mentioned brought upon them. Their sins were such as directly contradicted all God's kind and gracious designs concerning them.

1. God set them apart for himself, as a peculiar people, distinguished from, and dignified above, all other people (Num. xxiii. 9); but they were *replenished from the east*; they *naturalized* foreigners, not *proselyted*, and encouraged them to settle among them, and mingled with them, Hos. vii. 8. Their country was peopled with Syrians and Chaldeans, Moabites and Ammonites, and other eastern nations, and with them they admitted the fashions and customs of those nations, and *pleased themselves in the children of strangers*, were fond of them, preferred their country before their own, and thought that the more they conformed to them the more polite and refined they were; thus did they profane their crown and their covenant. Note, Those are in danger of being estranged from God who please themselves with those who are strangers to him, for we soon learn the ways of those whose company we love.

2. God gave them his oracles, which they might ask counsel of, not only the scriptures and the seers, but the breast-plate of

judgment; but they slighted these, and became soothsayers like the Philistines, introduced their arts of divination, and hearkened to those who by the stars, or the clouds, or the flight of birds, or the entrails of beasts, or other magic superstitions, pretended to discover things secret or foretell things to come. The Philistines were noted for diviners, 1 Sam. vi. 2. Note, Those who slight true divinity are justly given up to lying divinations; and those will certainly be forsaken of God who thus forsake him and their own mercies for lying vanities.

3. God encouraged them to put their confidence in him, and assured them that he would be their wealth and strength; but, distrusting his power and promise, they made gold their hope, and furnished themselves with horses and chariots, and relied upon them for their safety, v. 7. God had expressly forbidden even their kings to multiply horses to themselves and *greatly to multiply silver and gold*, because he would have them to depend upon himself only; but they did not think their interest in God made them a match for their neighbours unless they had as full treasures of silver and gold, and as formidable hosts of chariots and horses, as they had. It is not having silver and gold, horses and chariots, that is a provocation to God, but, (1.) Desiring them insatiably, so that there is no end of the treasures, no end of the chariots, no bounds or limits set to the desire of them. Those shall never have enough in God (who alone is all-sufficient) that never know when they have enough of this world, which at the best is insufficient. (2.) Depending upon them, as if we could not be safe, and easy, and happy, without them, and could not but be so with them.

4. God himself was their God, the sole object of their worship, and he himself instituted ordinances of worship for them; but they slighted both him and his institutions, v. 8. Their land was full of idols; every city had its god (Jer. xi. 13); and, according to the goodness of their lands, they made goodly images, Hos. x. 1. Those that think one God too little will find two too many, and yet hundreds not sufficient; for those that love idols will multiply them; so sottish were they, and so wretchedly infatuated, that they *worshipped the work of their own hands*, as if that could be a god to them which was not only a creature, but their creature and that which their own fancies had devised and *their own fingers had made*. It was an aggravation of their idolatry that God had enriched them with silver and gold, and yet of that silver and gold they made idols; so it was, *Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked*, see Hos. ii. 8.

5. God had advanced them, and put honour upon them; but they basely diminished and disparaged themselves (v. 9): *The*

*mean man boweth down to his idol*, a thing below the meanest that has any spark of reason left. Sin is a disparagement to the poorest and those of the lowest rank. It becomes the mean man to bow down to his superiors, but it ill becomes him to *bow down to the stock of a tree*, ch. xlv. 19. Nor is it only the illiterate and poor-spirited that do this, but even the *great man* forgets his grandeur and humbles himself to worship idols, deifies men no better than himself, and consecrates stones so much baser than himself. Idolaters are said to *debase themselves even to hell*, ch. lvii. 9. What a shame is it that great men think the service of the true God below them and will not stoop to it, and yet will humble themselves to bow down to an idol! Some make this a threatening that the mean men shall be brought down, and the great men humbled, by the judgments of God, when they come with commission.

10 Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty. 11 The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. 12 For the day of the LORD of hosts *shall be* upon every *one that is* proud and lofty, and upon every *one that is* lifted up; and he shall be brought low: 13 And upon all the cedars of Lebanon, *that are* high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan, 14 And upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills *that are* lifted up, 15 And upon every high tower, and upon every fenced wall, 16 And upon all the ships of Tarshish, and upon all pleasant pictures. 17 And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. 18 And the idols he shall utterly abolish. 19 And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth. 20 In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made *each one* for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats; 21 To go into the clefts of the rocks,



and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth. 22 Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?

The prophet here goes on to show what a desolation would be brought upon their land when God should have forsaken them. This may refer particularly to their destruction by the Chaldeans first, and afterwards by the Romans, or it may have a general respect to the method God takes to awaken and humble proud sinners, and to put them out of conceit with that which they delighted in and depended on more than God. We are here told that sooner or later God will find out a way,

I. To startle and awaken secure sinners, who cry peace to themselves, and bid defiance to God and his judgments (v. 10): "*Enter into the rock; God will attack you with such terrible judgments, and strike you with such terrible apprehensions of them, that you shall be forced to enter into the rock, and hide yourself in the dust, for fear of the Lord.* You shall lose all your courage, and tremble at the shaking of a leaf; your heart shall *fail you for fear* (Luke xxi. 26), and you shall *flee when none pursues*," Prov. xxviii. 1. To the same purport, v. 19. *They shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, the darkest the deepest places; they shall call to the rocks and mountains to fall on them, and rather crush them than not cover them*, Hos. x. 8. It was so particularly at the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans (Luke xxiii. 30) and of the persecuting pagan powers, Rev. vi. 16. And *all for fear of the Lord, and of the glory of his majesty*, looking upon him then to be a consuming fire and themselves as stubble before him, *when he arises to shake terribly the earth, to shake the wicked out of it* (Job xxxviii. 13), and to shake all those earthly props and supports with which they have buoyed themselves up, to shake them from under them. Note, 1. *With God is terrible majesty*, and the glory of it is such as sooner or later will oblige us all to flee before him. 2. Those that will not fear God and flee to him will be forced to fear him and flee from him to a refuge of lies. 3. It is folly for those that are pursued by the wrath of God to think to escape it, and to hide or shelter themselves from it. 4. The things of the earth are things that will be shaken; they are subject to concussions, and hastening towards a dissolution. 5. The shaking of the earth is, and will be, a terrible thing to those who set their affections wholly on things of the earth. 6. It will be in vain to think of finding refuge in the caves of the earth when the earth itself is shaken; there

will be no shelter then but in God and in things above.

II. To humble and abase proud sinners, that look big, and think highly of themselves, and scornfully of all about them (v. 11): *The lofty looks of man shall be humbled.* The eyes that aim high, the countenance in which the pride of the heart shows itself, shall be cast down in shame and despair. And the *haughtiness of men shall be bowed down*, their spirits shall be broken, and they shall be crest-fallen, and those things which they were proud of they shall be ashamed of. It is repeated (v. 17), *The loftiness of man shall be bowed down.* Note, Pride will, one way or other, have a fall. Men's haughtiness will be brought down, either by the grace of God convincing them of the evil of their pride, and clothing them with humility, or by the providence of God depriving them of all those things they were proud of and laying them low. Our Saviour often laid it down for a maxim that *he who exalts himself shall be abased*; he shall either abase himself in true repentance or God will abase him and pour contempt upon him. Now here we are told,

1. Why this shall be done: because the *Lord alone will be exalted.* Note, Proud men shall be vilified because the Lord alone will be magnified. It is for the honour of God's power to humble the proud; by this he proves himself to be God, and disproves Job's pretensions to rival with him, Job xl. 11—14. *Behold every one that is proud, and abase him; then will I also confess unto thee.* It is likewise for the honour of his justice. Proud men stand in competition with God, who is jealous for his own glory, and will not suffer men either to take to themselves or give to another that which is due to him only. They likewise stand in opposition to God; they resist him, and therefore he resists them; for he will be *exalted among the heathen* (Ps. xli. 10), and there is a day coming in which he alone will be exalted, when he shall have put down *all opposing rule, principality, and power*, 1 Cor. xv. 24.

2. How this shall be done: by humbling judgments, that shall mortify men, and bring them down (v. 12): *The day of the Lord of hosts, the day of his wrath and judgment, shall be upon every one that is proud.* He now laughs at their insolence because he sees that his day is coming, this day, which will be upon them ere they are aware, Ps. xxxvii. 13. This day of the Lord is here said to be upon *all the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up.* Jerome observes that the cedars are said to praise God (Ps. cxlviii. 9) and are *trees of the Lord* (Ps. civ. 16), of his planting (Isa. xli. 19), and yet here God's wrath fastens upon the cedars, which denotes (says he) that some of every rank of men, some great men, will be saved, and some perish. It is brought

in as an instance of the strength of God's voice that it *breaks the cedars* (Ps. xxix. 5), and here the day of the Lord is said to be *upon the cedars*, those of Lebanon, that were the straightest and stately, — upon the oaks, those of Bashan, that were the strongest and sturdiest, — upon the natural elevations and fortresses, *the high mountains and the hills that are lifted up* (v. 14), that over-top the valleys and seem to push the skies, — and upon the artificial fastnesses, *every high tower and every fenced wall*, v. 15. Understand these, (1.) As representing the proud people themselves, that are in their own apprehensions like the cedars and the oaks, firmly rooted, and not to be stirred by any storm, and looking on all around them as shrubs; these are the high mountains and the lofty hills that seem to fill the earth, that are gazed on by all, and think themselves immovable, but lie most obnoxious to God's thunderstrokes. *Feriantque summos fulmina montes* — *The highest hills are most exposed to lightning*. And before the power of God's wrath these mountains are scattered and these hills bow and *melt like wax*, Hab. iii. 6; Ps. lxxviii. 8. These vaunting men, who are as high towers in which the noisy bells are hung, on which the thundering murdering cannon are planted — these fenced walls, that fortify themselves with their native hardness, and intrench themselves in their fastnesses — shall be brought down. (2.) As particularizing the things they are proud of, in which they trust, and of which they make their boast. The day of the Lord shall be upon those very things in which they put their confidence as their strength and security; he will *take from them all their armour wherein they trusted*. Did the inhabitants of Lebanon glory in their cedars, and those of Bashan in their oaks, such as no country could equal? The day of the Lord should rend those cedars, those oaks, and the houses built of them. Did Jerusalem glory in the mountains that were round about it, as its impregnable fortifications, or in its walls and bulwarks? These should be levelled and laid low in the day of the Lord. Besides those things that were for their strength and safety they were proud, [1.] Of their trade abroad; but the day of the Lord shall be *upon all the ships of Tarshish*; they shall be broken as Jehoshaphat's were, shall founder at sea or be ship-wrecked in the harbour. Zebulun was a haven of ships, but should now no more rejoice in his going out. When God is bringing ruin upon a people he can sink all the branches of their revenue. [2.] Of their ornaments at home; but the day of the Lord shall be *upon all pleasant pictures*, the painting of their ships (so some understand it) or the curious pieces of painting they brought home in their ships from other countries, perhaps from Greece, which afterwards was

famous for painters. Upon *every thing that is beautiful to behold*; so some read it. Perhaps they were the pictures of their relations, and for that reason pleasant, or of their gods, which to the idolaters were delectable things; or they admired them for the fineness of their colours or strokes. There is no harm in making pictures, nor in adorning our rooms with them, provided they transgress not either the second or the seventh commandment. But to place our pictures among our pleasant things, to be fond of them and proud of them, to spend that upon them which should be laid out in charity, and to set our hearts upon them, as it ill becomes those who have so many substantial things to take pleasure in, so it tends to provoke God to strip us of all such vain ornaments.

III. To make idolaters ashamed of their idols, and of all the affection they have had for them and the respect they have paid to them (v. 18): *The idols he shall utterly abolish*. When the Lord alone shall be exalted (v. 17) he will not only pour contempt upon proud men, who like Pharaoh exalt themselves against him, but much more upon all pretended deities, who are rivals with him for divine honours. They shall be abolished, utterly abolished. Their friends shall desert them; their enemies shall destroy them; so that, one way or other, an utter riddance shall be made of them. See here, 1. The vanity of false gods; they cannot secure themselves, so far are they from being able to secure their worshippers. 2. The victory of the true God over them; for *great is the truth and will prevail*. Dagon fell before the ark, and Baal before the Lord God of Elijah. The gods of the heathen shall be famished (Zeph. ii. 11), and by degrees shall perish, Jer. x. 11. The rightful Sovereign will triumph over all pretenders. And, as God will abolish idols, so their worshippers shall abandon them, either from a gracious conviction of their vanity and falsehood (as Ephraim when he said, *What have I to do any more with idols?*) or from a late and sad experience of their inability to help them, and a woeful despair of relief by them, v. 20. When men are themselves frightened by the judgments of God into the holes of the rocks and the caves of the earth, and find that they do thus in vain shift for their own safety, they shall cast their idols, which they have made their gods and hoped to make their friends in the time of need, to the moles and to the bats, any where out of sight, that, being freed from the incumbrance of them, they may go into the clefts of the rocks, for fear of the Lord, v. 21. Note, (1.) Those that will not be reasoned out of their sins sooner or later shall be frightened out of them. (2.) God can make men sick of those idols that they have been most fond of, even the idols of silver and the idols of



gold, the most precious. Covetous men make silver and gold their idols, money their god; but the time may come when they may feel it as much their burden as ever they made it their confidence, and may find themselves as much exposed by it as ever they hoped they should be guarded by it, when it tempts their enemy, sinks their ship, or retards their flight. There was a time when the mariners threw the wares, and even the *wheat, into the sea* (Jonah i. 5; Acts xxvii. 38), and the *Syrians cast away their garments for haste*, 2 Kings vii. 15. Or men may cast it away out of indignation at themselves for leaning upon such a broken reed. See Ezek. vii. 19. The idolaters here throw away their idols because they are ashamed of them and of their own folly in trusting to them, or because they are afraid of having them found in their possession when the judgments of God are abroad; as the thief throws away his stolen goods when he is searched for or pursued. (3.) The darkest holes, where the moles and the bats lodge, are the fittest places for idols, that have eyes and see not; and God can force men to cast their own idols there (*ch. xxx. 22*), when they are *ashamed of the oaks which they have desired*, *ch. i. 29*. *Moab shall be ashamed of Chemosh, as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel*, Jer. xlviii. 13. (4.) It is possible that sin may be both loathed and left and yet not truly repented of—loathed because surfeited on, left because there is no opportunity of committing it, yet not repented of out of any love to God, but only from a slavish fear of his wrath.

IV. To make those that have trusted in an arm of flesh ashamed of their confidence (*v. 22*): "*Cease from man*. The providences of God concerning you shall speak this aloud to you, and therefore take warning beforehand, that you may prevent the uneasiness and shame of a disappointment; and consider, 1. How weak man is: *His breath is in his nostrils*, puffed out every moment, soon gone for good and all." Man is a dying creature, and may die quickly; our nostrils, in which our breath is, are of the outward parts of the body; what is there is like one standing at the door, ready to depart; nay, the doors of the nostrils are always open, the breath in them may slip away ere we are aware, in a moment. Wherein then is man to be accounted of? Alas! no reckoning is to be made of him, for he is not what he seems to be, what he pretends to be, what we fancy him to be. Man is like vanity, nay, he is vanity, he is altogether vanity, he is less, he is lighter, than vanity, when weighed in the balances of the sanctuary. "2. How wise therefore those are that cease from man;" it is our duty, it is our interest, to do so. "*Put not your trust in man*, nor make even the greatest and mightiest of men your confidence; cease to do so. Let not your eye be to the

power of man, for it is finite and limited, derived and depending; it is not from him that your judgment proceeds. Let not him be your fear, let not him be your hope; but look up to the power of God, to which all the powers of men are subject and subordinate; dread his wrath, secure his favour, take him for your help, and let your *hope be in the Lord your God*."

## CHAP. III.

The prophet, in this chapter, goes on to foretell the desolations that were coming upon Judah and Jerusalem for their sins, both that by the Babylonians and that which completed their ruin by the Romans, with some of the grounds of God's controversy with them. God threatens, I. To deprive them of all the supports both of their life and of their government, *ver. 1—3*. II. To leave them to fall into confusion and disorder, *ver. 4, 5, 12*. III. To deny them the blessing of magistracy, *ver. 6—8*. IV. To strip the daughters of Zion of their ornaments, *ver. 17—24*. V. To lay all waste by the sword of war, *ver. 25, 26*. The sins that provoked God to deal thus with them were, 1. Their defiance of God, *ver. 8*. 2. Their impudence, *ver. 9*. 3. The abuse of power to oppression and tyranny, *ver. 12—15*. 4. The pride of the daughters of Zion, *ver. 16*. In the midst of the chapter the prophet is directed how to address particular persons. (1.) To assure good people that it should be well with them, notwithstanding those general calamities, *ver. 10*. (2.) To assure wicked people that, however God might, in judgment, remember mercy, yet it should go ill with them, *ver. 11*. O that the nations of the earth, at this day, would hearken to the rebukes and warnings which this chapter gives!

**F**OR, behold, the LORD, the LORD of hosts, doth take away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stay and the staff, the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water, 2 The mighty man, and the man of war, the judge, and the prophet, and the prudent, and the ancient, 3 The captain of fifty, and the honourable man, and the counsellor, and the cunning artificer, and the eloquent orator. 4 And I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them. 5 And the people shall be oppressed, every one by another, and every one by his neighbour: the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honourable. 6 When a man shall take hold of his brother of the house of his father, *saying*, Thou hast clothing, be thou our ruler, and *let this ruin be under thy hand*: 7 In that day shall he swear, *saying*, I will not be an healer; for in my house is neither bread nor clothing: make me not a ruler of the people. 8 For Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen: because their tongue and their doings are against the LORD, to provoke the eyes of his glory.

The prophet, in the close of the foregoing chapter, had given a necessary caution to all not to put confidence in man, or any creature; he had also given a general reason for that

caution, taken from the frailty of human life and the vanity and weakness of human powers. Here he gives a particular reason for it—God was now about to ruin all their creature-confidences, so that they should meet with nothing but disappointments in all their expectations from them (v. 1): *The stay and the staff* shall be taken away, all their supports, of what kind soever, all the things they trusted to and looked for help and relief from. Their church and kingdom had now grown old and were going to decay, and they were (after the manner of aged men, Zech. viii. 4) leaning on a staff: now God threatens to take away their staff, and then they must fall of course, to take away the stays both of the city and of the country, of Jerusalem and of Judah, which are indeed stays to one another, and, if one fail, the other feels from it. He that does this is *the Lord, the Lord of hosts—Adon*, the Lord that is himself the stay or foundation; if that stay depart, all other stays certainly break under us, for he is the strength of them all. He that is the Lord, the ruler, that has authority to do it, and the Lord of hosts, that has ability to do it, he shall take away the stay and the staff. St. Jerome refers this to the sensible decay of the Jewish nation after they had crucified our Saviour, Rom. xi. 9, 10. I rather take it as a warning to all nations not to provoke God; for, if they make him their enemy, he can and will thus make them miserable. Let us view the particulars.

I. Was their plenty a support to them? It is so to any people; bread is the staff of life: but God can take away the whole stay of bread and the whole stay of water; and it is just with him to do so when fulness of bread becomes an iniquity (Ezek xvi. 49), and that which was given to be provision for the life is made provision for the lusts. He can take away the bread and the water by withholding the rain, Deut. xxviii. 23, 24. Or, if he allow them, he can take away the stay of bread and the stay of water by withholding his blessing, by which man lives, and not by bread only, and which is the staff of bread (Matt. iv. 4), and then the bread is not nourishing nor the water refreshing, Hag. i. 6. Christ is the bread of life and the water of life; if he be our stay, we shall find that this is a good part not to be taken away, John iv. 14; vi. 27.

II. Was their army a support to them—their generals, and commanders, and military men? These shall be taken away, either cut off by the sword or so discouraged with the defeats they meet with that they shall throw up their commissions and resolve to act no more; or they shall be disabled by sickness, or dispirited, so as to be unfit for business: *The mighty man, and the man of war*, and even the inferior officer, *the captain of fifty*, shall be removed. It bodes ill with a people when their valiant men

are lost. Let not the strong man therefore glory in his strength, nor any people trust too much to their mighty men; but let the strong people glorify God and the city of the terrible nations fear him, who can make them weak and despicable, *ch. xxv. 3.*

III. Were their ministers of state a support to them—their learned men, their politicians, their clergy, their wits and virtuosos? These also should be taken away—the judges, who were skilled in the laws, and expert in administering justice,—the prophets, whom they used to consult in difficult cases,—the prudent, who were celebrated as men of sense and sagacity above others and were assistants to the judges, the diviners (so the word is), those who used unlawful arts, who, though rotten stays, yet were stayed on (but it may be taken, as we read it, in a good sense),—the ancients, elders in age, in office,—the honourable man, the gravity of whose aspect commands reverence and whose age and experience make him fit to be a counsellor. Trade is one great support to a nation, even manufactures and handicraft trades; and therefore, when the whole stay is to be broken, the cunning artificer too shall be taken away; and the last is the eloquent orator, the man skilful of speech, who in some cases may do good service, though he be none of the prudent or the ancient, by putting the sense of others in good language. Moses cannot speak well, but Aaron can. God threatens to take these away, that is, 1. To disable them for the service of their country, making the judges fools, taking away the speech of the trusty and the understanding of the aged, Job xii. 17, &c. Every creature is that to us which God makes it to be; and we cannot be sure that those who have been serviceable to us shall always be so. 2. To put an end to their days; for the reason why princes are not to be trusted in is because their breath goeth forth, Ps. cxlvi. 3, 4. Note, The removal of useful men by death, in the midst of their usefulness, is a very threatening symptom to any people.

IV. Was their government a support to them? It ought to have been so; it is the business of the sovereign to bear up the pillars of the land, Ps. lxxv. 3. But it is here threatened that this stay should fail them. When the mighty men and the prudent are removed children shall be their princes—children in age, who must be under tutors and governors, who will be clashing with one another and making a prey of the young king and his kingdom—children in understanding and disposition, childish men, such as are babes in knowledge, no more fit to rule than a child in the cradle. These shall rule over them, with all the folly, fickleness, and frowardness, of a child. And woe unto thee, O land! when thy king is such a one! Eccl. x. 16.

V. Was the union of the subjects among



themselves, their good order and the good understanding and correspondence that they kept with one another, a stay to them? Where this is the case a people may do the better for it, though their princes be not such as they should be; but it is here threatened that God would send an evil spirit among them too (as Judg. ix. 23), which would make them, 1. Injurious and unneighbourly one towards another (v. 5): "*The people shall be oppressed every one by his neighbour, and their princes, being children, will take no care to restrain the oppressors or relieve the oppressed, nor is it to any purpose to appeal to them (which is a temptation to every man to be his own avenger), and therefore they bite and devour one another and will soon be consumed one of another. Then homo homini lupus—man becomes a wolf to man; jusque datum sceleri—wickedness receives the stamp of law; nec hospes ab hospite tutus—the guest and the host are in danger from each other.*" 2. Insolent and disorderly towards their superiors. It is as ill an omen to a people as can be when the rising generation among them are generally untractable, rude, and ungovernable, when *the child behaves himself proudly against the ancient*, whereas he should *rise up before the hoary head and honour the face of the old man*, Lev. xix. 32. When young people are conceited and pert, and behave scornfully towards their superiors, their conduct is not only a reproach to themselves, but of ill consequence to the public; it slackens the reins of government and weakens the hands that hold them. It is likewise ill with a people when persons of honour cannot support their authority, but are affronted by the base and beggarly, when judges are insulted and their powers set at defiance by the mob. Those have a great deal to answer for who do this.

VI. Is it some stay, some support, to hope that, though matters may be now ill-managed, yet others may be raised up, who may manage better? Yet this expectation also shall be frustrated, for the case shall be so desperate that no man of sense or substance will meddle with it.

1. The government shall go a begging, v. 6. Here, (1.) It is taken for granted that there is no way of redressing all these grievances, and bringing things into order again, but by good magistrates, who shall be invested with power by common consent, and shall exert that power for the good of the community. And it is probable that this was, in many places, the true origin of government; men found it necessary to unite in a subjection to one who was thought fit for such a trust, in order to the welfare and safety of them all, being aware that they must either be ruled or ruined. Here therefore is the original contract: "*Be thou our ruler, and we will be subject to thee, and let this ruin be under thy hand, to be*

repaired and restored, and then to be preserved and established, and the interests of it advanced, ch. lviii. 12. Take care to protect us by the sword of war from being injured from abroad, and by the sword of justice from being injurious one to another, and we will bear faith and true allegiance to thee." (2.) The case is represented as very deplorable, and things as having come to a sad pass; for, [1.] Children being their princes, every man will think himself fit to prescribe who shall be a magistrate, and will be for preferring his own relations; whereas, if the princes were as they should be, it would be left entirely to them to nominate the rulers, as it ought to be. [2.] Men will find themselves under a necessity even of forcing power into the hands of those that are thought to be fit for it: *A man shall take hold by violence of one to make him a ruler, perceiving him ready to resist the motion: nay, he shall urge it upon his brother; whereas, commonly, men are not willing that their equals should be their superiors, witness the envy of Joseph's brethren.* [3.] It will be looked upon as ground sufficient for the preferring of a man to be a ruler that he has clothing better than his neighbours—a very poor qualification to recommend a man to a place of trust in the government. It was a sign that the country was much impoverished when it was a rare thing to find a man that had good clothes, or that could afford to buy himself an alderman's gown or a judge's robes; and it was proof enough that the people were very unthinking when they had so much respect to a man in *gay clothing, with a gold ring* (Jam. ii. 2, 3), that, for the sake thereof, they would make him their ruler. It would have been some sense to have said, "*Thou hast wisdom, integrity, experience; be thou our ruler.*" But it was a jest to say, *Thou hast clothing; be thou our ruler.* A poor wise man, though in vile raiment, delivered a city, Eccl. ix. 15. We may allude to this to show how desperate the case of fallen man was when our Lord Jesus was pleased to become our brother, and, though he was not courted, offered himself to be our ruler and Saviour, and to take this ruin under his hand.

2. Those who are thus pressed to come into office will swear themselves off, because, though they are taken to be men of some substance, yet they know themselves unable to bear the charges of the office and to answer the expectations of those that choose them (v. 7): *He shall swear (shall lift up the hand, the ancient ceremony used in taking an oath) I will not be a healer; make not me a ruler.* Note, Rulers must be healers, and good rulers will be so; they must study to unite their subjects, and not widen the differences that are among them. Those only are fit for government that are of a meek, quiet, healing, spirit. They must

also heal the wounds that are given to any of the interests of their people, by suitable applications. But why will he not be a ruler? Because in my house is neither bread nor clothing. (1.) If he said true, it was a sign that men's estates were sadly ruined when even those who made the best appearance really wanted necessities—a common case, and a piteous one. Some who, having lived fashionably, are willing to put the best side outwards, are yet, if the truth were known, in great straits, and go with heavy hearts for want of bread and clothing. (2.) If he did not speak truth, it was a sign that men's consciences were sadly debauched, when, to avoid the expense of an office, they would load themselves with the guilt of perjury, and (which is the greatest madness in the world) would damn their souls to save their money, Matt. xvi. 26. (3.) However it was, it was a sign that the case of the nation was very bad when nobody was willing to accept a place in the government of it, as despairing to have either credit or profit by it, which are the two things aimed at in men's common ambition of preferment.

3. The reason why God brought things to this sad pass, even among his own people (which is given either by the prophet or by him that refused to be a ruler); it was not for want of good will to his country, but because he saw the case desperate and past relief, and it would be to no purpose to attempt it (v. 8): *Jerusalem is ruined and Judah is fallen*; and they may thank themselves. They have brought their destruction upon their own heads, for *their tongue and their doings are against the Lord*; in word and action they broke the law of God and therein designed an affront to him; they wilfully intended to offend him, in contempt of his authority and defiance of his justice. Their tongue was against the Lord, for they contradicted his prophets; and their doings were no better, for they acted as they talked. It was an aggravation of their sin that God's eye was upon them, and that his glory was manifested among them; but they provoked him to his face, as if the more they knew of his glory the greater pride they took in slighting it, and turning it into shame. And this, this, is it for which Jerusalem is ruined. Note, The ruin both of persons and people is owing to their sins. If they did not provoke God, he would do them no hurt, Jer. xxv. 6.

9 The shew of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not. Woe unto their soul! For they have rewarded evil unto themselves. 10 Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their

doings. 11 Woe unto the wicked! It shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him. 12 As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths. 13 The Lord standeth up to plead, and standeth to judge the people. 14 The Lord will enter into judgment with the ancients of his people, and the princes thereof: for ye have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses. 15 What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor? saith the Lord God of hosts.

Here God proceeds in his controversy with his people. Observe,

I. The ground of his controversy. It was for sin that God contended with them; if they vex themselves, let them look a little further and they will see that they must thank themselves: *Woe unto their souls! For they have rewarded evil unto themselves. Alas for their souls!* (so it may be read, in a way of lamentation), *for they have procured evil to themselves*, v. 9. Note, The condition of sinners is woeful and very deplorable. Note also, It is the soul that is damaged and endangered by sin. Sinners may prosper in their outward estates, and yet at the same time there may be a woe to their souls. Note, further, Whatever evil befalls sinners it is of their own procuring, Jer. ii. 19. That which is here charged upon them is, 1. That the shame which should have restrained them from their sins was quite thrown off and they had grown impudent, v. 9. This hardens men against repentance, and ripens them for ruin, as much as any thing: *The shew of their countenance doth witness against them* that their minds are vain, and lewd, and malicious; their eyes declare plainly that they cannot cease from sin, 2 Pet. ii. 14. One may look them in the face and guess at the desperate wickedness that there is in their hearts: *They declare their sin as Sodom*, so impetuous, so imperious, are their lusts, and so impatient of the least check, and so perfectly are all the remaining sparks of virtue extinguished in them. The Sodomites declared their sin, not only by the exceeding greatness of it (Gen. xiii. 13), so that it cried to heaven (Gen. xviii. 20), but by their shameless owning of that which was most shameful (Gen. xix. 5); and thus Judah and Jerusalem did: they were so far from hiding it that they gloried in it, in the bold attempts they made upon virtue, and the victory they gained over their own con-



victions. They had a whore's forehead (Jer. iii. 3) and could not blush, Jer. vi. 15. Note. Those that have grown impudent in sin are ripe for ruin. Those that are past shame (we say) are past grace, and then past hope. 2. That their guides, who should direct them in the right way, put them out of the way (v. 12): "*Those who lead thee (the princes, priests, and prophets) mislead thee; they cause thee to err.*" Either they preached to them that which was false and corrupt, or, if they preached that which was true and good, they contradicted it by their practices, and the people would sooner follow a bad example than a good exhortation. Thus they *destroyed the way of their paths*, pulling down with one hand what they built up with the other. *Quite beatificant—Those that call thee blessed* cause thee to err; so some read it. Their priests applauded them, as if nothing were amiss among them, cried *Peace, peace*, to them, as if they were in no danger; and thus they caused them to go on in their errors. 3. That their judges, who should have patronized and protected the oppressed, were themselves the greatest oppressors, v. 14, 15. The elders of the people, and the princes, who had learning and could not but know better things, who had great estates and were not under the temptation of necessity to encroach upon those about them, and who were men of honour and should have scorned to do a base thing, yet *they have eaten up the vineyard*. God's vineyard, which they were appointed to be the dressers and keepers of, they burnt (so the word signifies); they did as ill by it as its worst enemies could do, Ps. lxxx. 16. Or the vineyards of the poor they wrested out of their possession, as Jezebel did Naboth's, or devoured the fruits of them, fed their lusts with that which should have been the necessary food of indigent families; the spoil of the poor was hoarded up in their houses; when God came to search for stolen goods there he found it, and it was a witness against them. It was to be had, and they might have made restitution, but would not. God reasons with these great men (v. 15): "*What mean you, that you beat my people in pieces?* What cause have you for it? What good does it do you?" Or, "What hurt have they done you? Do you think you had power given you for such a purpose as this?" Note, There is nothing more unaccountable, and yet nothing which must more certainly be accounted for, than the injuries and abuses that are done to God's people by their persecutors and oppressors. "*You grind the faces of the poor*; you put them to as much pain and terror as if they were ground in a mill, and as certainly reduce them to dust by one act of oppression after another." Or, "Their faces are bruised and crushed with the blows you have given them; you have not only

ruined their estates, but have given them personal abuses." Our Lord Jesus was *smitten on the face*, Matt. xxvi. 67.

II. The management of this controversy. 1. God himself is the prosecutor (v. 13): "*The Lord stands up to plead*, or he sets himself to debate the matter, and he *stands to judge the people*, to judge for those that were oppressed and abused; and he will *enter into judgment with the princes*, v. 14. Note, The greatest of men cannot exempt or secure themselves from the scrutiny and sentence of God's judgment, nor demur to the jurisdiction of the court of heaven. 2. The indictment is proved by the notorious evidence of the fact: "*Look upon the oppressors, and the show of their countenance witnesses against them* (v. 9); look upon the oppressed, and you see how their faces are battered and abused," v. 15. 3. The controversy is already begun in the change of the ministry. To punish those that had abused their power to bad purposes God sets those over them that had not sense to use their power to any good purposes: "*Children are their oppressors, and women rule over them* (v. 12), men that have as weak judgments and strong passions as women and children: this was their sin, that their rulers were such, and it became a judgment upon them.

III. The distinction that shall be made between particular persons, in the prosecution of this controversy (v. 10, 11): "*Say to the righteous, It shall be well with thee. Woe to the wicked; it shall be ill with him.*" He had said (v. 9), *they have rewarded evil to themselves*, in proof of which he here shows that God will *render to every man according to his works*. Had they been righteous, it would have been well with them; but, if it be ill with them, it is because they are wicked and will be so. Thus God stated the matter to Cain, to convince him that he had no reason to be angry, Gen. iv. 7. Or it may be taken thus: God is threatening national judgments, which will ruin the public interests. Now, 1. Some good people might fear that they should be involved in that ruin, and therefore God bids the prophets comfort them against those fears: "Whatever becomes of the unrighteous nation, let the *righteous man* know that he shall not be lost in the crowd of sinners; the *Judge of all the earth will not slay the righteous with the wicked* (Gen. xviii. 25); no, assure him, in God's name, that *it shall be well with him*. The property of the trouble shall be altered to him, and he shall be *hidden in the day of the Lord's anger*. He shall have divine supports and comforts, which shall abound as afflictions abound, and so it shall be well with him." When the whole *stay of bread is taken away*, yet in the day of famine the *righteous shall be satisfied*; they shall eat the fruit of their doings—they shall have the testimony of their consciences for them that they kept themselves

pure from the common iniquity, and therefore the common calamity is not the same thing to them that it is to others; they brought no fuel to the flame, and therefore are not themselves fuel for it. 2. Some wicked people might hope that they should escape that ruin, and therefore God bids the prophets shake their vain hopes: "*Woe to the wicked; it shall be ill with him, v. 11.* To him the judgments shall have a sting, and there shall be *wormwood and gall* in the affliction and misery." There is a woe to wicked people, and, though they may think to shelter themselves from public judgments, yet it shall be ill with them; it will grow worse and worse with them if they repent not, and the worst of all will be at last; for *the reward of their hands shall be given them*, in the day when every man shall receive according to the things done in the body.

16 Moreover the LORD saith, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched-forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet: 17 Therefore the LORD will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the LORD will discover their secret parts. 18 In that day the LORD will take away the bravery of *their tinkling ornaments about their feet*, and *their cauls*, and *their round tires like the moon*, 19 The chains, and the bracelets, and the mufflers, 20 The bonnets, and the ornaments of the legs, and the headbands, and the tablets, and the earrings, 21 The rings, and nose jewels, 22 The changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping pins, 23 The glasses, and the fine linen, and the hoods and the veils. 24 And it shall come to pass, *that* instead of sweet smell, there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle a rent; and instead of well-set hair baldness; and instead of a stomacher a girding of sackcloth; and burning instead of beauty. 25 Thy men shall fall by the sword, and thy mighty in the war. 26 And her gates shall lament and mourn; and she *being* desolate shall sit upon the ground.

The prophet's business was to show all sorts of people what they had contributed to the national guilt and what share they must

expect in the national judgments that were coming. Here he reproves and warns the daughters of Zion, tells the ladies of their faults; and Moses, in the law, having denounced God's wrath against *the tender and delicate woman* (the prophets being a comment upon the law, Deut. xxviii. 56), he here tells them how they shall smart by the calamities that are coming upon them. Observe,

I. The sin charged upon the daughters of Zion, v. 16. The prophet expressly vouches God's authority for what he said, lest it should be thought it was unbecoming in him to take notice of such things, and should be resented by the ladies: *The Lord saith it.* "Whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, let them know that God takes notice of, and is much displeased with, the folly and vanity of proud women, and his law takes cognizance even of their dress." Two things they here stand indicted for—haughtiness and wantonness, directly contrary to that *modesty, shamefacedness, and sobriety, with which women ought to adorn themselves*, 1 Tim. ii. 9. They discovered the disposition of their mind by their gait and gesture, and the lightness of their carriage. They are haughty, for they *walk with stretched-forth necks*, that they may seem tall, or, as thinking nobody good enough to speak to them or to receive a look or a smile from them. Their eyes are wanton, *deceiving* (so the word is): with their amorous glances they draw men into their snares. They affect a formal starched way of going, that people may look at them, and admire them, and know they have been at the dancing-school, and have learned the minuet-step. They go *mincing*, or nicely tripping, not willing to set so much as the sole of their foot to the ground, for tenderness and delicacy. They make a *tinkling with their feet*, having, as some think, chains, or little bells, upon their shoes, that made a noise: they go *as if they were fettered* (so some read it), like a horse trammelled, that he may learn to pace. Thus Agag came delicately, 1 Sam. xv. 32. Such a nice affected mien is not only a force upon that which is natural, and ridiculous before men, men of sense; but, as it is an evidence of a vain mind, it is offensive to God. And two things aggravated it here:—1. That these were the daughters of Zion, the holy mountain, who should have behaved with the gravity that becomes women professing godliness. 2. That it should seem, by the connexion, they were the wives and daughters of the princes who spoiled and oppressed the poor (v. 14, 15) that they might maintain this pride and luxury of their families.

II. The punishments threatened for this sin; and they answer the sin as face answers to face in a glass, v. 17, 18. 1. They *walked with stretched-forth necks*, but God will *smite*



*with a scab the crown of their head*, which shall lower their crests, and make them ashamed to show their heads, being obliged by it to cut off their hair. \*Note, Loathsome diseases are often sent as the just punishment of pride, and are sometimes the immediate effect of lewdness, the flesh and the body being consumed by it. 2. They cared not what they laid out in furnishing themselves with great variety of fine clothes; but God will reduce them to such poverty and distress that they shall not have clothes sufficient to cover their nakedness, but their uncomeliness shall be exposed through their rags. 3. They were extremely fond and proud of their ornaments; but God will strip them of those ornaments, when their houses shall be plundered, their treasures rifled, and they themselves led into captivity. The prophet here specifies many of the ornaments which they used as particularly as if he had been the keeper of their wardrobe or had attended them in their dressing-room. It is not at all material to enquire what sort of ornaments these respectively were and whether the translations rightly express the original words; perhaps 100 years hence the names of some of the ornaments that are now in use in our own land will be as little understood as some of those here mentioned now are. Fashions alter, and so do the names of them; and yet the mention of them is not in vain, but is designed to expose the folly of the daughters of Zion; for, (1.) Many of these things, we may suppose, were very odd and ridiculous, and, if they had not been in fashion, would have been hooted at. They were fitter to be toys for children to play with than ornaments for grown people to go to Mount Zion in. (2.) Those things that were decent and convenient, as *the linen, the hoods, and the veils*, needed not to be provided in such abundance and variety. It is necessary to have apparel and proper that all should have it according to their rank; but what occasion was there for so many changeable suits of apparel (v. 22), that they might not be seen two days together in the same suit? "They must have (as the "homily against excess of apparel speaks) "one gown for the day, another for the "night—one long, another short—one for "the working day, another for the holy-day "—one of this colour, another of that "colour—one of cloth, another of silk or "damask—one dress afore dinner, another "after—one of the Spanish fashion, another "Turkey, and never content with sufficient." All this, as it is an evidence of pride and vain curiosity, so must needs spend a great deal in gratifying a base lust that ought to be laid out in works of piety and charity; and it is well if poor tenants be not racked, or poor creditors defrauded, to support it. (3.) The enumeration of

these things intimates what care they were in about them, how much their hearts were upon them, what an exact account they kept of them, how nice and critical they were about them, how insatiable their desire was of them, and how much of their comfort was bound up in them. A maid could forget none of these ornaments, though they were ever so many (Jer. ii. 32), but would report them as readily, and talk of them with as much pleasure, as if they had been things of the greatest moment. The prophet did not speak of these things as in themselves sinful (they might lawfully be had and used), but as things which they were proud of and should therefore be deprived of.

IV. They were very nice and curious about their clothes; but God would make those bodies of theirs, which they were at such expense to beautify and make easy, a reproach and burden to them (v. 24): *Instead of sweet smell* (those tablets, or boxes, of perfume, *houses of the soul or breath*, as they are called, v. 20, margin) *there shall be stink*, garments grown filthy with being long worn, or from some loathsome disease or plasters for the cure of it. *Instead of a rich embroidered girdle* used to make the clothes sit tight, there shall be *a rent*, a rending of the clothes for grief, or old rotten clothes rent into rags. *Instead of well-set hair*, curiously plaited and powdered, there shall be *baldness*, the hair being plucked off or shaven, as was usual in times of great affliction (ch. xv. 2; Jer. xvi. 6), or in great servitude, Ezek. xxix. 18. *Instead of a stomacher*, or a scarf or sash, there shall be *a girding of sackcloth*, in token of deep humiliation; and *burning instead of beauty*. Those that had a good complexion, and were proud of it, when they are carried into captivity shall be tanned and sun-burnt; and it is observed that the best faces are soonest injured by the weather. From all this let us learn, 1. Not to be nice and curious about our apparel, not to affect that which is gay and costly, nor to be proud of it. 2. Not to be secure in the enjoyment of any of the delights of sense, because we know not how soon we may be stripped of them, nor what straits we may be reduced to.

V. They designed by these ornaments to charm the gentlemen, and win their affections (Prov. vii. 16, 17), but there shall be none to be charmed by them (v. 25): *Thy men shall fall by the sword, and thy nightly in the war. The fire shall consume them*, and then the maidens shall not be given in marriage; as it is, Ps. lxxviii. 63. When the sword comes with commission the mighty commonly fall first by it, because they are most forward to venture. And, when Zion's guards are cut off, no marvel that Zion's gates lament and mourn (v. 26), the enemies having made themselves masters of them; and the city itself, being desolate, being

enaptied or swept, shall sit upon the ground like a disconsolate widow. If sin be harboured within the walls, lamentation and mourning are near the gates.

CHAP. IV.

In this chapter we have, I. A threatening of the paucity and scarceness of men (ver. 1.) which might fitly enough have been added to the close of the foregoing chapter, to which it has a plain reference. II. A promise of the restoration of Jerusalem's peace and purity, righteousness and safety, in the days of the Messiah, ver. 2-4. Thus, in wrath, mercy is remembered, and gospel grace is a sovereign relief, in reference to the terrors of the law and the desolations made by sin.

AND in that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel: only let us be called by thy name, to take away our reproach.

It was threatened (*ch. iii. 25*) that the mighty men should fall by the sword in war, and it was threatened as a punishment to the women that affected gaiety and a loose sort of conversation. Now here we have the effect and consequence of that great slaughter of men, 1. That though Providence has so wisely ordered that, *communibus annis—on an average of years*, there is nearly an equal number of males and females born into the world, yet, through the devastations made by war, there should scarcely be one man in seven left alive. As there are deaths attending the bringing forth of children, which are peculiar to the woman, who was first in the transgression, so, to balance that, there are deaths peculiar to men, those by the sword in the high places of the field, which perhaps devour more than child-bed does. Here it is foretold that such multitudes of men should be cut off that there should be *seven women to one man*. 2. That by reason of the scarcity of men, though marriage should be kept up for the raising of recruits and the preserving of the race of mankind upon earth, yet the usual method of it should be quite altered,—that, whereas men ordinarily make their court to the women, the women should now take hold of the men, foolishly fearing, (as Lot's daughters did, when they saw the ruin of Sodom and perhaps thought it reached further than it did,) that in a little time there would be none left, (*Gen. xix. 31.*)—that, whereas women naturally hate to come in sharers with others, seven should now, by consent, become the wives of one man,—and that whereas by the law the husband was obliged to provide food and raiment for his wife, (*Exod. xxi. 10.*) which with many would be the most powerful argument against multiplying wives, these women will be bound to support themselves; they will eat bread of their own earning, and wear apparel of their own working, and the man they court shall be at no expense upon them, only they desire to be called his wives, to take away the reproach of a single

life. They are willing to be wives upon any terms, though ever so unreasonable; and perhaps the rather because in these troublesome times it would be a kindness to them to have a husband for their protector. Paul, on the contrary, thinks the single state preferable in a time of distress, 1 Cor. vii. 26. It were well if this were not introduced here partly as a reflection upon the daughters of Zion, that, notwithstanding the humbling providences they were under (*ch. iii. 18*), they remained unhumiliated, and, instead of repenting of their pride and vanity, when God was contending with them for them, all their care was to get husbands—that modesty, which is the greatest beauty of the fair sex, was forgotten, and with them the reproach of vice was nothing to the reproach of virginity, a sad symptom of the irrecoverable desolations of virtue.

2 In that day shall the branch of the LORD be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel. 3 And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem: 4 When the LORD shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning. 5 And the LORD will create upon every dwelling-place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence. 6 And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the day time from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain.

By the foregoing threatenings Jerusalem is brought into a very deplorable condition: everything looks melancholy. But here the sun breaks out from behind the cloud. Many exceedingly great and precious promises we have in these verses, giving assurance of comfort which may be discerned through the troubles, and of happy days which shall come after them, and these certainly point at the kingdom of the Messiah, and the great redemption to be wrought out by him, under the figure and type of the restoration of Judah and Jerusalem by the reforming reign of Hezekiah after Ahaz and the re-



turn out of their captivity in Babylon; to both these events the passage may have some reference, but chiefly to Christ. It is here promised, as the issue of all these troubles,

I. That God will raise up a righteous branch, which shall produce fruits of righteousness (v. 2): *In that day*, that same day, at that very time, when Jerusalem shall be destroyed and the Jewish nation extirpated and dispersed, the kingdom of the Messiah shall be set up; and then shall be the reviving of the church, when every one shall fear the utter ruin of it.

1. Christ himself shall be exalted. He is the *branch of the Lord*, the man the branch; it is one of his prophetic names, *my servant the branch* (Zech. iii. 8; vi. 12), the *branch of righteousness* (Jer. xxiii. 5; xxxiii. 15), a *rod out of the stem of Jesse* and a *branch out of his roots* (ch. xi. 1), and this, as some think, is alluded to when he is called a *Nazarene*, Matt. ii. 23. Here he is called *the branch of the Lord*, because planted by his power and flourishing to his praise. The ancient Chaldees paraphrase here reads it, *The Christ, or Messiah, of the Lord*. He shall be the beauty, and glory, and joy. (1.) He shall himself be advanced to the joy set before him and the glory which he had with the Father before the world was. He that was a reproach of men, and whose visage was marred more than any man's, is now, in the upper world, beautiful and glorious, as the sun in his strength, admired and adored by angels. (2.) He shall be beautiful and glorious in the esteem of all believers, shall gain an interest in the world, and a name among men above every name. To those that believe he is precious, he is an honour (1 Pet. ii. 7), the *fairest of ten thousand* (Cant. v. 10), and altogether glorious. Let us rejoice that he is so, and let him be so to us.

2. His gospel shall be embraced. The success of the gospel is the fruit of the branch of the Lord; all the graces and comforts of the gospel spring from Christ. But it is called *the fruit of the earth* because it sprang up in this world and was calculated for the present state. And Christ compares himself to a *grain of wheat*, that *falls into the ground and dies, and so brings forth much fruit*, John xii. 24. The success of the gospel is represented by *the earth's yielding her increase* (Ps. lxxv. 6), and the planting of the Christian church is God's *sowing it to himself in the earth*, Hos. ii. 23. We may understand it of both the persons and the things that are the products of the gospel: they shall be excellent and comely, shall appear very agreeable and be very acceptable to those that have escaped of Israel, to that remnant of the Jews which was saved from perishing with the rest in unbelief, Rom. xi. 5. Note, If Christ be precious to us, his gospel will be so and all its truths

and promises—his church will be so, and all that belong to it. These are the good fruit of the earth, in comparison with which all other things are but weeds. It will be a good evidence to us that we are of the chosen remnant, distinguished from the rest that are called *Israel*, and marked for salvation, if we are brought to see a transcendent beauty in Christ, and in holiness, and in the saints, the excellent ones of the earth. As a type of this blessed day, Jerusalem, after Sennacherib's invasion and after the captivity in Babylon, should again flourish as a branch, and be blessed with the fruits of the earth. Compare ch. xxxvii. 31, 32. *The remnant shall again take root downward and bear fruit upward*. And, if by the fruit of the earth here we understand the good things of this life, we may observe that these have peculiar sweetness in them to the chosen remnant, who, having a covenant-right to them, have the most comfortable use of them. If the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious in our eyes, even the fruit of the earth also will be excellent and comely, because then we may take it as the fruit of the promise, Ps. xxxvii. 16; 1 Tim. iv. 8.

II. That God will reserve to himself a holy seed, v. 3. When the generality of those that have a place and a name in Zion and in Jerusalem shall be cut off as withered branches, by their own unbelief, yet some shall be left. Some shall remain, some shall still cleave to the church, when its property is altered and it has become Christian; for God will not quite *cast off his people*, Rom. xi. 1. There is here and there one that is left. Now, 1. This is a remnant *according to the election of grace* (as the apostle speaks, Rom. xi. 5), such as are written among the living, marked in the counsel and fore-knowledge of God for life and salvation, *written to life* (so the word is), designed and determined for it unalterably; for "*what I have written I have written*." Those that are kept alive in killing dying times were written for life in the book of divine Providence; and shall we not suppose those who are rescued from a greater death to be such as were *written in the Lamb's book of life*? Rev. xiii. 8. As many as were *ordained unto eternal life believed to the salvation of the soul*, Acts xiii. 48. Note, All that were *written among the living* shall be found among the living, every one; for of all that were given to Christ he will lose none. 2. It is a remnant *under the dominion of grace*; for every one that is *written among the living*, and is accordingly left, shall be called *holy*, shall be holy, and shall be accepted of God accordingly. Those only that are holy shall be left when the *Son of man shall gather out of his kingdom every thing that offends*; and all that are chosen to salvation are chosen to sanctification. See 2 Thess. ii. 13; Eph. i. 4.

III. That God will reform his church and

will rectify and amend whatever is amiss in it, v. 4. 'Then the remnant shall be called *holy*, when the Lord shall have washed away their filth, washed it from among them by cutting off the wicked persons, washed it from within them by purging out the wicked thing. They shall not be called so till they are in some measure made so. Gospel times are times of reformation (Heb. ix. 10), typified by the reformation in the days of Hezekiah and that after the captivity, to which this promise refers. Observe, 1. The places and persons to be reformed. Jerusalem, though the holy city, needed reformation; and, being the holy city, the reformation of that would have a good influence upon the whole kingdom. The daughters of Zion also must be reformed, the women in a particular manner, whom he had reproved, ch. iii. 16. When they were decked in their ornaments they thought themselves wondrously clean; but, being proud of them, the prophet calls them their *filth*, for no sin is more abominable to God than pride. Or by the daughters of Zion may be meant the country towns and villages, which were related to Jerusalem as the mother-city, and which needed reformation. 2. The reformation itself. The filth shall be washed away; for wickedness is filthiness, particularly blood-shed, for which Jerusalem was infamous (2 Kings xxi. 16), and which defiles the land more than any other sin. Note, The reforming of a city is the cleansing of it. When vicious customs and fashions are suppressed, and the open practice of wickedness is restrained, the place is made clean and sweet which before was a dunghill; and this is not only for its credit and reputation among strangers, but for the comfort and health of the inhabitants themselves. 3. The author of the reformation: *The Lord shall do it*. Reformation-work is God's work; if any thing be done to purpose in it, it is his doing. But how? By the judgment of his providence the sinners were destroyed and consumed; but it is by the Spirit of his grace that they are reformed and converted. This is work that is done, not by might, nor by power, but by the *Spirit of the Lord of hosts* (Zech. iv. 6), working both upon the sinners themselves that are to be reformed and upon magistrates, ministers, and others that are to be employed as instruments of reformation. The Spirit herein ac's, (1.) As a spirit of judgment, enlightening the mind, convincing the conscience,—as a Spirit of wisdom, guiding us to deal prudently, (Isa. li. 13),—as a discerning, distinguishing, Spirit, separating between the precious and the vile. (2.) As a Spirit of burning, quickening and invigorating the affections, and making men zealously affected in a good work. The Spirit works as fire, Matt. iii. 11. An ardent love to Christ and souls, and a flaming zeal

against sin, will carry men on with resolution in their endeavours to *turn away ungodliness from Jacob*. See Isa. xxxii. 15, 16.

IV. That God will protect his church, and all that belong to it (v. 5, 6); when they are purified and reformed they shall no longer lie exposed, but God will take a particular care of them. Those that are sanctified are well fortified; for God will be to them a guide and a guard.

1. Their tabernacles shall be defended, v. 5.

(1.) This writ of protection refers to, [1.] Their dwelling-places, the tabernacles of their rest, their own houses, where they worship God, alone, and with their families. That blessing which is upon the *habitation of the just* shall be a protection to it, Prov. iii. 33. In the *tabernacles of the righteous* shall the *voice of rejoicing and salvation be*, Ps. cxviii. 15. Note, God takes particular cognizance and care of the dwelling-places of his people, of every one of them, the poorest cottage as well as the stateliest palace. When iniquity is *put far from the tabernacle* the Almighty shall be its defence, Job xxii. 23, 25. [2.] Their assemblies or tabernacles of meeting for religious worship. No mention is made of the temple, for the promise points at a time when not one stone of that shall be left upon another; but all the congregations of Christians, though but two or three met together in Christ's name, shall be taken under the special protection of heaven; they shall no more be scattered, no more disturbed, nor shall *any weapon formed against them prosper*. Note, we ought to reckon it a great mercy if we have liberty to worship God in public, free from the alarms of the sword of war or persecution.

(2.) This writ of protection is drawn up, [1.] In a similitude taken from the safety of the camp of Israel when they marched through the wilderness. God will give to the Christian church as real proofs, though not so sensible, of his care of them, as he then gave to Israel. The Lord will again *create a cloud and smoke by day*, to screen them from the scorching heat of the sun, and the *shining of a flaming fire by night*, to enlighten and warm the air, which in the night is cold and dark. See Exod. xiii. 21; Neh. ix. 19. This pillar of cloud and fire interposed between the Israelites and the Egyptians, Exod. xiv. 20. Note, Though miracles have ceased, yet God is the same to the New-Testament church that he was to Israel of old; the very same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. [2.] In a similitude taken from the outside cover of rams' skins and badgers' skins that was upon the curtains of the tabernacle, as if every dwelling-place of Mount Zion and every assembly were as dear to God as that tabernacle was: *Upon all the glory shall be a defence*, to save it from wind and weather. Note, The church



on earth has its glory. Gospel truths and ordinances, the scriptures and the ministry, are the church's glory; and upon all this glory there is a defence, and ever shall be, for the *gates of hell shall not prevail against the church*. If God himself be the glory in the midst of it, he will himself be a wall of fire round about it, impenetrable and impregnable. Grace in the soul is the glory of it, and those that have it are *kept by the power of God* as in a strong-hold, 1 Pet. i. 5.

2. Their tabernacle shall be a defence to them, v. 6. God's tabernacle was a pavilion to the saints (Ps. xxvii. 5); but, when that is taken down, they shall not want a covert: the divine power and goodness shall be a tabernacle to all the saints. God himself will be their hiding-place (Ps. xxxii. 7); they shall be at home in him, Ps. xci. 9. He will himself be to them as the *shadow of a great rock* (ch. xxxii. 2) and *his name a strong tower*, Prov. xviii. 10. He will be not only a shadow from the heat in the day-time, but a covert from storm and rain. Note, In this world we must expect change of weather and all the inconveniencies that attend it; we shall meet with storm and rain in this lower region, and at other times the heat of the day no less burdensome; but God is a refuge to his people in all weathers.

## CHAP. V.

In this chapter the prophet, in God's name, shows the people of God their transgressions, even the house of Jacob their sins, and the judgments which were likely to be brought upon them for their sins. I. By a parable, under the similitude of an unfruitful vineyard, representing the great favours God had bestowed upon them, their disappointing his expectations from them, and the ruin they had thereby deserved, ver. 1—7. II. By an enumeration of the sins that did abound among them, with a threatening of punishments that should answer to the sins. 1. Covetousness, and greediness of worldly wealth, which shall be punished with famine, ver. 8—10. 2. Rioting, revelling, and drunkenness (ver. 11, 12, 22, 23), which shall be punished with captivity and all the miseries that attend it, ver. 13—17. 3. Presumption in sin, and defying the justice of God, ver. 18, 19. 4. Confounding the distinctions between virtue and vice, and so undermining the principles of religion, ver. 20. 5. Self-conceit, ver. 21. 6. Perverting justice, for which, and the other instances of reigning wickedness among them, a great and general desolation is threatened, which should lay all waste (ver. 24, 25), and which should be effected by a foreign invasion (ver. 26—30), referring perhaps to the havoc made not long after by Sennacherib's army.

**N**OW will I sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: 2 And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a wine-press therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. 3 And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. 4 What could have been done more to my vineyard,

that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? 5 And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: 6 And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briers and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. 7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry.

See what variety of methods the great God takes to awaken sinners to repentance, by convincing them of sin, and showing them their misery and danger by reason of it. To this purport he speaks sometimes in plain terms and sometimes in parables, sometimes in prose and sometimes in verse, as here. "We have tried to *reason with you* (ch. i. 18); now let us put your case into a poem, inscribed to the honour of my well beloved." God the Father dictates it to the honour of Christ his well beloved Son, whom he has constituted Lord of the vineyard. The prophet sings it to the honour of Christ too, for he is his well beloved. The Old-Testament prophets were friends of the bridegroom. Christ is God's beloved Son and our beloved Saviour. Whatever is said or sung of the church must be intended to his praise, even that which (like this) tends to our shame. This parable was put into a song that it might be the more moving and affecting, might be the more easily learned and exactly remembered, and the better transmitted to posterity; and it is an exposition of the song of Moses (Deut. xxxii.), showing that what he then foretold was now fulfilled. Jerome says, Christ the well-beloved did in effect sing this mournful song when he beheld Jerusalem *and wept over it* (Luke xix. 41), and had reference to it in the parable of the vineyard (Matt. xxi. 33, &c.), only here the fault was in the vines, there in the husbandmen. Here we have,

I. The great things which God had done for the Jewish church and nation. When all the rest of the world lay in common, not cultivated by divine revelation, that was his vineyard, they were his peculiar people. He acknowledged them as his own, set them apart for himself. The soil they were planted in was extraordinary; it was a *very fruitful hill, the horn of the son of oil*: so it

is in the margin. There was plenty, a cornucopia; and there was dainty: they did there eat the fat and drink the sweet, and so were furnished with abundance of good things to honour God with in sacrifices and free-will offerings. The advantages of our situation will be brought into the account another day. Observe further what God did for this vineyard. 1. He fenced it, took it under his special protection, kept it night and day under his own eye, lest any should hurt it, *ch. xxvii. 2, 3.* If they had not themselves thrown down their fence, no inroad could have been made upon them, *Ps. cxxv. 2; cxxi. 4.* 2. He gathered the stones out of it, that, as nothing from without might damage it, so nothing within might obstruct its fruitfulness. He professed his grace to take away the stony heart. 3. He planted it with the choicest vine, set up a pure religion among them, gave them a most excellent law, instituted ordinances very proper for the keeping up of their acquaintance with God, *Jer. ii. 21.* 4. He built a tower in the midst of it, either for defence against violence or for the dressers of the vineyard to lodge in; or rather it was for the owner of the vineyard to sit in, to take a view of the vines (*Cant. vii. 12*)—a summer-house. The temple was this tower, about which the priests lodged, and where God promised to meet his people, and gave them the tokens of his presence among them and pleasure in them. 5. He made a wine-press therein, set up his altar, to which the sacrifices, as the fruits of the vineyard, should be brought.

II. The disappointment of his just expectations from them: *He looked that it should bring forth grapes*, and a great deal of reason he had for that expectation. Note, God expects vineyard-fruit from those that enjoy vineyard-privileges, not leaves only, as *Mark xi. 13.* A bare profession, though ever so green, will not serve: there must be more than buds and blossoms. Good purposes and good beginnings are good things, but not enough; there must be fruit, a good heart and a good life, vineyard fruit, thoughts and affections, words and actions, agreeable to the Spirit, which is the fatness of the vineyard (*Gal. v. 22, 23*), *answerable to the ordinances*, which are the dressings of the vineyard, acceptable to God, the Lord of the vineyard, and fruit according to the season. Such fruit as this God expects from us, grapes, the fruit of the vine, with which they honour God and man (*Judg. ix. 13*); and his expectations are neither high nor hard, but righteous and very reasonable. Yet see how his expectations are frustrated: *It brought forth wild grapes*; not only no fruit at all, but bad fruit, worse than none, grapes of Sodom, *Deut. xxxii. 32.* 1. Wild grapes are the fruits of the corrupt nature, fruit according to the crab-stock, not according to the engrafted branch,

from the root of bitterness, *Heb. xii. 15.* Where grace does not work corruption will.

2. Wild grapes are hypocritical performances in religion, that look like grapes, but are sour or bitter, and are so far from being pleasing to God that they are provoking, as theirs mentioned in *ch. i. 11.* Counterfeit grapes are wild grapes.

III. An appeal to themselves whether upon the whole matter God must not be justified and they condemned, *v. 3, 4.* And now the case is plainly stated: *O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah! judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard.* This implies that God was blamed about them. There was a controversy between them and him; but the equity was so plain on his side that he could venture to put the decision of the controversy to their own consciences. "Let any inhabitant of Jerusalem, any man of Judah, that has but the use of his reason and a common sense of equity and justice, speak his mind impartially in this matter." Here is a challenge to any man to show, 1. Any instance wherein God had been wanting to them: *What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?* He speaks of the external means of fruitfulness, and such as might be expected from the dresser of a vineyard, from whom it is not required that he should change the nature of the vine. *What ought to have been done more?* so it may be read. They had every thing requisite for instruction and direction in their duty, for quickening them to it and putting them in mind of it. No inducements were wanting to persuade them to it, but all arguments were used that were proper to work either upon hope or fear; and they had all the opportunities they could desire for the performance of their duty, the new moons, and the sabbaths, and solemn feasts; they had the scriptures, the lively oracles, a standing ministry in the priests and Levites, besides what was extraordinary in the prophets. No nation had statutes and judgments so righteous. 2. Nor could any tolerable excuse be offered for their walking thus contrary to God. "Wherefore, what reason can be given why it should bring forth wild grapes, when I looked for grapes?" Note, The wickedness of those that profess religion, and enjoy the means of grace, is the most unreasonable unaccountable thing in the world, and the whole blame of it must lie upon the sinners themselves. "*If thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it*, and shalt not have a word to say for thyself in the judgment of the great day." God will prove his own ways equal and the sinner's ways unequal.

IV. Their doom read, and a righteous sentence passed upon them for their bad conduct towards God (*v. 5, 6*): "*And now go to*, since nothing can be offered in excuse of the crime or arrest of the judgment, *I will*



*tell you what I am now determined to do to my vineyard.* I will be vexed and troubled with it no more; since it will be good for nothing, it shall be good for nothing; in short, it shall cease to be a vineyard, and be turned into a wilderness: the church of the Jews shall be unchurched; their charter shall be taken away, and they shall become *lo-ammi—not my people*." 1. "They shall no longer be distinguished as a peculiar people, but be laid in common: *I will take away the hedge thereof*, and then it will soon be eaten up and become as bare as other ground." They mingled with the nations and therefore were justly scattered among them. 2. "They shall no longer be protected as God's people, but left exposed. God will not only suffer the wall to go to decay, but he will break it down, will remove all their defences from them, and then they will become an easy prey to their enemies, who have long waited for an opportunity to do them a mischief, and will now tread them down and trample upon them." 3. "They shall no longer have the face of a vineyard, the form and shape of a church and commonwealth, but shall be levelled and laid waste." This was fulfilled when *Jerusalem for their sakes was ploughed as a field*, Mic. iii. 12. 4. "No more pains shall be taken with them by magistrates or ministers, the dressers and keepers of their vineyard; it shall not be pruned nor digged, but every thing shall run wild, and nothing shall come up but briars and thorns, the products of sin and the curse," Gen. iii. 18. When errors and corruptions, vice and immorality, go without check or control, no testimony borne against them, no rebuke given them or restraint put upon them, the vineyard is unpruned, is not dressed, or ridded; and then it will soon be like the vineyard of the man void of understanding, all grown over with thorns. 5. "That which completes its woe is that the dews of heaven shall be withheld; he that has the key of the clouds will command them that they rain no rain upon it, and that alone is sufficient to turn it into a desert." Note, God, in a way of righteous judgment, denies his grace to those that have long received it in vain. The sum of all is that those who would not bring forth good fruit should bring forth none. The curse of barrenness is the punishment of the sin of barrenness, as Mark xi. 14. This had its partial accomplishment in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, its full accomplishment in the final rejection of the Jews, and has its frequent accomplishment in the departure of God's Spirit from those persons who have long resisted him and striven against him, and the removal of his gospel from those places that have been long a reproach to it, while it has been an honour to them. It is no loss to God to lay his vineyard waste; for he can, when he please, turn a wilderness into a

fruitful field; and, when he does thus dismantle a vineyard, it is but as he did by the garden of Eden, which, when man had by sin forfeited his place in it, was soon levelled with common soil.

V. The explanation of this parable, or a key to it (v. 7), where we are told, 1. What is meant by the vineyard (it is the *house of Israel*, the body of the people, incorporated in one church and commonwealth), and what by the vines, the pleasant plants, the plants of God's pleasure, which he had been pleased in and delighted in doing good to; they are the *men of Judah*; these he had dealt graciously with, and from them he expected suitable returns. 2. What is meant by the grapes that were expected and the wild grapes that were produced: *He looked for judgment and righteousness*, that the people should be honest in all their dealings and the magistrates should strictly administer justice. This might reasonably be expected among a people that had such excellent laws and rules of justice given them (Deut. iv. 8); but the fact was quite otherwise; instead of judgment there was the cruelty of the oppressors, and instead of righteousness the cry of the oppressed. Every thing was carried by clamour and noise, and not by equity and according to the merits of the cause. It is sad with a people when wickedness has usurped the place of judgment, Eccl. iii. 16. It is very sad with a soul when instead of the grapes of humility, meekness, patience, love, and contempt of the world, which God looks for, there are the wild grapes of pride, passion, discontent, malice, and contempt of God—instead of the grapes of praying and praising, the wild grapes of cursing and swearing, which are a great offence to God. Some of the ancients apply this to the Jews in Christ's time, among whom God looked for righteousness (that is, that they should receive and embrace Christ), but behold a cry, that cry, *Crucify him, crucify him*.

8 Woe unto them that join house to house, *that* lay field to field, till *there be* no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth! 9 In mine ears *said* the LORD of hosts, Of a truth many houses shall be desolate, *even* great and fair, without inhabitant. 10 Yea, ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath, and the seed of an homer shall yield an ephah. 11 Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, *that* they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, *till* wine inflame them! 12 And the harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts: but they regard

not the work of the LORD, neither consider the operation of his hands. 13 Therefore my people are gone into captivity, because *they have* no knowledge: and their honourable men *are* famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst. 14 Therefore hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure: and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth, shall descend into it. 15 And the mean man shall be brought down, and the mighty man shall be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled: 16 But the LORD of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness. 17 Then shall the lambs feed after their manner, and the waste places of the fat ones shall strangers eat.

The world and the flesh are the two great enemies that we are in danger of being overpowered by; yet we are in no danger if we do not ourselves yield to them. Eager-ness of the world, and indulgence of the flesh, are the two sins against which the prophet, in God's name, here denounces woes. These were sins which then abounded among the men of Judah, some of the wild grapes they brought forth (v. 4), and for which God threatens to bring ruin upon them. They are sins which we have all need to stand upon our guard against and dread the consequences of.

I. Here is a woe to those who set their hearts upon the wealth of the world, and place their happiness in that, and increase it to themselves by indirect and unlawful means (v. 8), who *join house to house and lay field to field, till there be no place, no room for any body to live by them*. If they could succeed, they would be placed alone in the midst of the earth, would monopolize possessions and preferments, and engross all profits and employments to themselves. Not that it is a sin for those who have a house and a field, if they have wherewithal, to purchase another; but

1. Their fault is, (1.) That they are inordinate in their desires to enrich themselves, and make it their whole care and business to raise an estate, as if they had nothing to mind, nothing to seek, nothing to do, in this world, but that. They never know when they have enough, but the more they have the more they would have; and, like the *daughters of the horseleech*, they cry, *Give, give*. They cannot enjoy what they have, nor do good with it, but are constantly contriving

and studying to make it more. They must have variety of houses, a winter-house, and a summer-house, and if another man's house or field lie convenient to theirs, as Naboth's vineyard to Ahab's, they must have that too, or they cannot be easy. (2.) That they are herein careless of others, nay, and injurious to them. They would live so as to let nobody live but themselves. So that their insatiable covetings may be gratified, they care not what becomes of all about them, what encroachments they make upon their neighbours' rights, what hardships they put upon those that they have power over or advantage against, nor what base and wicked arts they use to heap up treasure to themselves. They would swell so big as to fill all space, and yet are still unsatisfied (Eccl. v. 10), as Alexander, who, when he fancied he had conquered the world, wept because he had not another world to conquer. *Deficiente terrâ, non impletur avaritia*—*If the whole earth were monopolized, avarice would thirst for more*. What! will you be placed alone in the midst of the earth? (so some read it); will you be so foolish as to desire it, when we have so much need or the service of others and so much comfort in their society? Will you be so foolish as to expect that the *earth shall be forsaken for us* (Job xviii. 4), when it is by multitudes that the earth is to be replenished? *An propter vos solos tanta terra creata est?*—*Was the wide world created merely for you?* Lyra.

2. That which is threatened as the punishment of this sin is that neither the houses nor the fields they were thus greedy of should turn to any account, v. 9, 10. God whispered it to the prophet in his ear, as he speaks in a like case (ch. xxii. 14): *It was revealed in my ears by the Lord of hosts* (as God told Samuel a thing in his ear, 1 Sam. ix. 15); he thought he heard it still sounding in his ears; but he proclaimed it, as he ought, *upon the house-tops*, Matt. x. 27. (1.) That the houses they were so fond of should be untenanted, should stand long empty, and so should yield them no rent, and go out of repair: *Many houses shall be desolate*, the people that should dwell in them, being cut off by sword, famine, or pestilence, or carried into captivity; or trade being dead, and poverty coming upon the country like an armed man, those that had been housekeepers were forced to become lodgers, or shift for themselves elsewhere. Even great and fair houses, that would invite tenants, and (there being a scarcity of tenants) might be taken at low rates, shall stand empty without inhabitants. God created not the earth in vain; he *formed it to be inhabited*, ch. xlv. 18. But men's projects are often frustrated, and what they frame answers not the intention. We have a saying, That fools build houses for wise men to live in; but sometimes, as the event proves, they



are built for no man to live in. God has many ways to empty the most populous cities. (2.) That the fields they were so fond of should be unfruitful (*v. 10*): *Ten acres of vineyard shall yield only such a quantity of grapes as will make but one bath of wine* (which was about eight gallons), *and the seed of a homer*, a bushel's sowing of ground, shall yield but an ephah, which was the tenth part of a homer; so that through the barrenness of the ground, or the unseasonableness of the weather, they should not have more than a tenth part of their seed again. Note, Those that set their hearts upon the world will justly be disappointed in their expectations from it.

II. Here is a woe to those that dote upon the pleasures and delights of sense, *v. 11, 12*. Sensuality ruins men as certainly as worldliness and oppression. As Christ pronounced a woe against those that are rich, so also against those that laugh now and are full (*Luke vi. 24, 25*), and fare sumptuously, *Luke xvi. 19*. Observe,

1. Who the sinners are against whom this woe is denounced. (1.) They are such as are given to drink; they make drinking their business, have their hearts upon it, and overcharge themselves with it. They rise early to follow strong drink, as husbandmen and tradesmen do to follow their employments; as if they were afraid of losing time from that which is the greatest misspending of time. Whereas commonly those that are drunken are drunken in the night, when they have despatched the business of the day, these neglect business, abandon it, and give up themselves to the service of the flesh; for they sit at their cups all day, *and continue till night, till wine inflame them*—inflame their lusts (chambering and wantonness follow upon rioting and drunkenness)—inflame their passions; for who but such have *contentions and wounds without cause*? *Prov. xxiii. 29—35*. They make a perfect trade of drinking; nor do they seek the shelter of the night for this work of darkness, as men ashamed of it, but *count it a pleasure to riot in the day-time*. See *2 Pet. ii. 13*. (2.) They are such as are given to mirth. They have their feasts, and they are so merrily disposed that they cannot dine or sup without music, musical instruments of all sorts, like David (*Amos vi. 5*), like Solomon (*Eccl. ii. 8*): *the harp and the viol, the tabret and pipe*, must accompany the wine, that every sense may be gratified to a nicety; they *take the timbrel and harp*, *Job xxi. 12*. The use of music is lawful in itself; but when it is excessive, when we set our hearts upon it, misspend time in it, so that it crowds our spiritual and divine pleasures and draws away the heart from God, then it turns into sin to us. (3.) They are such as never give their mind to any thing that is serious: *They regard not the work of the Lord*; they observe not his power, wisdom, and good-

ness, in those creatures which they abuse and subject to vanity, nor the bounty of his providence in giving them those good things which they make the food and fuel of their lusts. God's judgments have already seized them, and they are under the tokens of his displeasure, but they regard not; they consider not the hand of God in all these things; his hand is lifted up, but they will not see, because they will not disturb themselves in their pleasures nor think what God is doing with them.

2. What the judgments are which are denounced against them, and in part executed. It is here foretold, (1.) That they should be dislodged; the land should spue out these drunkards (*v. 13*): *My people* (so they called themselves, and were proud of it) *have therefore gone into captivity*, are as sure to go as if they were gone already, *because they have no knowledge*; how should they have knowledge when by their excessive drinking they make sots and fools of themselves? They set up for wits; but because they regard not God's controversy with them, nor take any care to make their peace with him, they may truly be said to have no knowledge; and the reason is because they will have none; they are inconsiderate and wilful, and are therefore destroyed for lack of knowledge. (2.) That they should be impoverished, and come to want that which they had wasted and abused to excess: *Even their glory are men of famine*, subject to it and slain by it; and *their multitude are dried up with thirst*. Both the great men and the common people are ready to perish for want of bread and water. This is the effect of the failure of the corn (*v. 10*), for *the king himself is served of the field*, *Eccl. v. 9*. And when the vintage fails the drunkards are called upon to weep, because *the new wine is cut off from their mouth* (*Joel i. 5*), and not so much because now they want it as because when they had it they abused it. It is just with God to make men want that for necessity which they have abused to excess. (3.) That multitudes should be cut off by famine and sword (*v. 14*). *Therefore hell has enlarged herself*. Tophet, the common burying-place, proves too little; so many are there to be buried that they shall be forced to enlarge it. The grave has opened her mouth without measure, *never saying, It is enough*, *Prov. xxx. 15, 16*. It may be understood of the place of the damned; luxury and sensuality fill those regions of darkness and horror; there those are tormented who made a god of their belly, *Luke xvi. 25*; *Phil. iii. 19*. (4.) That they should be humbled and abased, and all their honours laid in the dust. This will be done effectually by death and the grave: *Their glory shall descend*, not only to the earth, but into it; it shall not descend after them (*Ps. xlix. 17*), to stand

them in any stead on the other side death, but it shall die and be buried with them—poor glory, which will thus wither! Did they glory in their numbers? Their multitude shall go down to the pit, Ezek. xxxi. 18; xxxii. 32. Did they glory in the figure they made? Their pomp shall be at an end; their shouts with which they triumphed, and were attended. Did they glory in their mirth? Death will turn it into mourning; he that rejoices and revels, and never knows what it is to be serious, shall go thither where there are weeping and wailing. Thus the mean man and the mighty man meet together in the grave and under mortifying judgments. Let a man be ever so high, death will bring him low—ever so mean, death will bring him lower, in the prospect of which the eyes of the lofty should now be humbled, v. 15. It becomes those to look low that must shortly be laid low.

3. What the fruit of these judgments shall be.

(1.) God shall be glorified, v. 16. He that is the Lord of hosts, and the holy God, shall be exalted and sanctified in the judgment and righteousness of these dispensations. His justice must be owned in bringing those low that exalted themselves; and herein he is glorified, [1.] As a God of irresistible power. He will herein be exalted as the Lord of hosts, that is able to break the strongest, humble the proudest, and tame the most unruly. Power is not exalted but in judgment. It is the honour of God that, though he has a mighty arm, yet *judgment and justice are always the habitation of his throne*, Ps. lxxxix. 13, 14. [2.] As a God of unspotted purity. He that is holy, infinitely holy, shall be sanctified (that is, shall be owned and declared to be holy) in the righteous punishment of proud men. Note, When proud men are humbled the great God is honoured, and ought to be honoured by us.

(2.) Good people shall be relieved and succoured (v. 17): *Then shall the lambs feed after their manner; the meek ones of the earth, who followed the Lamb, who were persecuted and put into fear by those proud oppressors, shall feed quietly, feed in the green pastures, and there shall be none to make them afraid.* See Ezek. xxxiv. 14. When the enemies of the church are cut off then have the churches rest. *They shall feed at their pleasure; so some read it. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth, and delight themselves in abundant peace. They shall feed according to their order or capacity (so others read it), as they are able to hear the word, that bread of life.*

(3.) The country shall be laid waste, and become a prey to the neighbours: *The waste places of the fat ones, the possessions of those rich men that lived at their ease, shall be eaten by strangers that were nothing akin to them. In the captivity the*

poor of the land were left for *vine-dressers and husbandmen* (2 Kings xxv. 12); these were the lambs that fed in the pastures of the fat ones, which were laid in common for strangers to eat. When the church of the Jews, those fat ones, was laid waste, their privileges were transferred to the Gentiles, who had been long strangers, and the lambs of Christ's flock were welcome to them.

18 Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope: 19 That say, Let him make speed, *and* hasten his work, that we may see *it*: and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know *it*! 20 Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! 21 Woe unto *them that are* wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! 22 Woe unto *them that are* mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink: 23 Which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him! 24 Therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, *so* their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust: because they have cast away the law of the Lord of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. 25 Therefore is the anger of the Lord kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them: and the hills did tremble, and their carcasses *were* torn in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand *is* stretched out still. 26 And he will lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will hiss unto them from the end of the earth: and, behold, they shall come with speed swiftly: 27 None shall be weary nor stumble among them; none shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall the girdle of their loins be loosed, nor the latchet of their shoes be broken: 28 Whose arrows *are* sharp, and all their bows bent, their horses' hoofs shall be counted like



flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind: 29 Their roaring *shall be* like a lion, they shall roar like young lions: yea, they shall roar, and lay hold of the prey, and shall carry it away safe, and none shall deliver it. 30 And in that day they shall roar against them like the roaring of the sea: and if *one* look unto the land, behold darkness *and* sorrow, and the light is darkened in the heavens thereof.

Here are, I. Sins described which will bring judgments upon a people: and this perhaps is not only a charge drawn up against the men of Judah who lived at that time, and the particular articles of that charge, though it may relate primarily to them, but is rather intended for warning to all people, in all ages, to take heed of these sins, as destructive both to particular persons and to communities, and exposing men to God's wrath and his righteous judgments. Those are here said to be in a woeful condition,

1. Who are eagerly set upon sin, and violent in their sinful pursuits (v. 18), who *draw iniquity with cords of vanity*, who take as much pains to sin as the cattle do that draw in a team, who put themselves to the stretch for the gratifying of their inordinate appetites, and, to humour a base lust, offer violence to nature itself. They think themselves as sure of compassing their wicked project as if they were pulling it towards them with strong cart-ropes; but they will find themselves disappointed, for they will prove cords of vanity, which will break when they come to any stress. For *the righteous Lord will cut in sunder the cords of the wicked*, Ps. cxxix. 4; Job iv. 8; Prov. xxii. 8. They are by long custom and confirmed habits so hardened in sin that they cannot get clear of it. Those that sin through infirmity are drawn away by sin; those that sin presumptuously draw iniquity to them, in spite of the oppositions of Providence and the checks of conscience. Some by sin understand the punishment of sin: they pull God's judgments upon their own heads, as it were, with cart-ropes.

2. Who set the justice of God at defiance, and challenge the Almighty to do his worst (v. 19): *They say, Let him make speed, and hasten his work*; this is the same language with that of the scoffers of the last days, who say, *Where is the promise of his coming?* and therefore it is that, like them, they *draw iniquity with cords of vanity*, are violent and daring in sin, and walk after their own lusts, 2 Pet. iii. 3, 4. (1.) They ridicule the prophets, and banter them. It is in scorn that they call God *the Holy One of Israel*, because the prophets used with great veneration to

call him so. (2.) They will not believe the revelation of God's wrath from heaven against their ungodliness and unrighteousness; unless they see it executed, they will not know it, as if the curse were *brutum fulmen—a mere flash*, and all the threatenings of the word bugbears to frighten fools and children. (3.) If God should appear against them, as he has threatened, yet they think themselves able to make their part good with him, and provoke him to jealousy, as if they were stronger than he, 1 Cor. x. 22. "We have heard his word, but it is all talk; let him hasten his work, we shall shift for ourselves well enough." Note, Those that wilfully persist in sin consider not the power of God's anger.

3. Who confound and overthrow the distinctions between moral good and evil, *who call evil good and good evil* (v. 20), who not only live in the omission of that which is good, but condemn it, argue against it, and, because they will not practise it themselves, run it down in others, and fasten invidious epithets upon it—not only do that which is evil, but justify it, and applaud it, and recommend it to others as safe and good. Note, (1.) Virtue and piety are good, for they are light and sweet, they are pleasant and right; but sin and wickedness are evil: they are darkness, all the fruit of ignorance and mistake, and will be bitterness in the latter end. (2.) Those do a great deal of wrong to God, and religion, and conscience, to their own souls, and to the souls of others, who misrepresent these, and put false colours upon them—who call drunkenness good fellowship, and covetousness good husbandry, and, when they persecute the people of God, think they do him good service—and, on the other hand, who call seriousness ill-nature, and sober singularity ill-breeding, who say all manner of evil falsely concerning the ways of godliness, and do what they can to form in men's minds prejudices against them, and this in defiance of evidence as plain and convincing as that of sense, by which we distinguish, beyond contradiction, between light and darkness, and between that which to the taste is sweet and that which is bitter.

4. Who though they are guilty of such gross mistakes as these have a great opinion of their own judgments, and value themselves mightily upon their understanding (v. 21): *They are wise in their own eyes*: they think themselves able to disprove and baffle the reproofs and convictions of God's word, and to evade and elude both the searches and the reaches of his judgments; they think they can outwit Infinite Wisdom and countermine Providence itself. Or it may be taken more generally: God resists the proud, those particularly who are conceited of their own wisdom and lean to their own understanding; such must become fools, that they may be truly wise, or else, at their end.

they shall appear to be fools before all the world.

5. Who glory in it as a great accomplishment that they are able to bear a great deal of strong liquor without being overcome by it (v. 22), *who are mighty to drink wine*, and use their strength and vigour, not in the service of their country, but in the service of their lusts. Let drunkards know from this scripture that, (1.) They ungratefully abuse their bodily strength, which God has given them for good purposes, and by degrees cannot but weaken it. (2.) It will not excuse them from the guilt of drunkenness that they can drink hard and yet keep their feet. (3.) Those who boast of their drinking down others glory in their shame. (4.) How light soever men make of their drunkenness, it is a sin which will certainly lay them open to the wrath and curse of God.

6. Who, as judges, pervert justice, and go counter to all the rules of equity, v. 23. This follows upon the former; they *drink and forget the law* (Prov. xxxi. 5), and *err through wine* (ch. xxviii. 7), and take bribes, that they may have wherewithal to maintain their luxury. They *justify the wicked for reward*, and find some pretence or other to clear him from his guilt and shelter him from punishment; and they condemn the innocent, and *take away their righteousness from them*, that is, overrule their pleas, deprive them of the means of clearing up their innocency, and give judgment against them. In causes between man and man, might and money would at any time prevail against right and justice; and he who was ever so plainly in the wrong would with a small bribe carry the cause and recover costs. In criminal causes, though the prisoner ever so plainly appeared to be guilty, yet for a reward they would acquit him; if he were innocent, yet if he did not fee them well, nay, if they were feed by the malicious prosecutor, or if they themselves had spleen against him, they would condemn him.

II. The judgments described, which these sins would bring upon them. Let not those expect to live easily who live thus wickedly; for the righteous God will take vengeance, v. 24—30. Here we may observe,

1. How complete this ruin will be, and how necessarily and unavoidably it will follow upon their sins. He had compared this people to a vine (v. 7), well fixed, and which, it was hoped, would be flourishing and fruitful; but the grace of God towards it was received in vain, and then the root became rottenness, being dried up from beneath, and the blossom would of course blow off as dust, as a light and worthless thing, Job xviii. 16. Sin weakens the strength, the root, of a people, so that they are easily rooted up; it defaces the beauty, the blossoms, of a people, and takes away the hopes of fruit. The sin of unfruit-

fulness is punished with the plague of unfruitfulness. Sinners make themselves as stubble and chaff, combustible matter, proper fuel to the fire of God's wrath, which then of course devours and consumes them, *as the fire devours the stubble*, and nobody can hinder it, or cares to hinder it. Chaff is consumed, unhelped and unpitied.

2. How just the ruin will be: *Because they have cast away the law of the Lord of hosts*, and would not have him to reign over them; and, as the law of Moses was rejected and thrown off, so *the word of the Holy One of Israel* by his servants the prophets, putting them in mind of his law and calling them to obedience, was despised and disregarded. God does not reject men for every transgression of his law and word; but, when his word is despised and his law cast away, what can they expect but that God should utterly abandon them?

3. Whence this ruin should come (v. 25) it is destruction from the Almighty. (1.) The justice of God appoints it; for that is *the anger of the Lord* which is *kindled against his people*, his necessary vindication of the honour of his holiness and authority. (2.) The power of God effects it: *He has stretched forth his hand against them*. That hand which had many a time been stretched out for them against their enemies is now stretched out against them at full length and in its full vigour; and *who knows the power of his anger?* Whether they are sensible of it or no, it is God that has smitten them, has blasted their vine and made it wither.

4. The consequences and continuance of this ruin. When God comes forth in wrath against a people the hills tremble, fear seizes even their great men, who are strong and high, the earth shakes under men and is ready to sink; and as this feels dreadful (what does more so than an earthquake?) so what sight can be more frightful than the carcases of men torn with dogs, or thrown *as dung* (so the margin reads it) *in the midst of the streets?* This intimates that great multitudes should be slain, not only soldiers in the field of battle, but the inhabitants of their cities put to the sword in cold blood, and that the survivors should neither have hands nor hearts to bury them. This is very dreadful, and yet such is the merit of sin that, *for all this, God's anger is not turned away*; that fire will burn as long as there remains any of the stubble and chaff to be fuel for it; and *his hand*, which he stretched forth against his people to smite them, because they do not by prayer take hold of it, nor by reformation submit themselves to it, *is stretched out still*.

5. The instruments that should be employed in bringing this ruin upon them: it should be done by the incursions of a foreign enemy, that should lay all waste. No particular enemy is named, and there-



fore we are to take it as a prediction of all the several judgments of this kind which God brought upon the Jews, Sennacherib's invasion soon after, and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans first and at last by the Romans; and I think it is to be looked upon also as a threatening of the like desolation of those countries which harbour and countenance those sins mentioned in the foregoing verses; it is an exposition of those woes. When God designs the ruin of a provoking people,

(1.) He can send a great way off for instruments to be employed in effecting it; he can raise forces from afar, and summon them from the end of the earth to attend his service, *v.* 26. Those who know him not are made use of to fulfil his counsel, when, by reason of their distance, they can scarcely be supposed to have any ends of their own to serve. If God set up his standard, he can incline men's hearts to enlist themselves under it, though perhaps they know not why or wherefore. When the Lord of hosts is pleased to make a general muster of the forces he has at his command, he has a great army in an instant, *Joel* ii. 2, 11. He needs not sound a trumpet, nor beat a drum, to give them notice or to animate them; no, he does but hiss to them, or rather whistle to them, and that is enough; they hear that, and that puts courage into them. Note, God has all the creatures at his beck.

(2.) He can make them come into the service with incredible expedition: *Behold, they shall come with speed swiftly.* Note, [1.] Those who will do God's work must not loiter, must not linger, nor shall they when his time has come. [2.] Those who defy God's judgments will be ashamed of their insolence when it is too late; they said scornfully (*v.* 19), *Let him make speed, let him hasten his work,* and they shall find, to their terror and confusion, that he will; *in one hour has the judgment come.*

(3.) He can carry them on in the service with amazing forwardness and fury. This is described here in very elegant and lofty expressions, *v.* 27—30. [1.] Though their marches be very long, yet *none among them shall be weary*; so desirous shall they be to engage that they shall forget their weariness, and make no complaints of it. [2.] Though the way be rough, and perhaps embarrassed by the usual policies of war, yet none among them shall *stumble*, but all the difficulties in their way shall easily be got over. [3.] Though they be forced to keep constant watch, yet *none shall slumber nor sleep*, so intent shall they be upon their work, in prospect of having the plunder of the city for their pains. [4.] They shall not desire any rest or relaxation; they shall not put off their clothes, nor *loose the girdle of their loins*, but shall always have their belts on and swords by their sides. [5.] They shall not meet with the least hindrance to retard their march or

oblige them to halt; not a *latchet of their shoes shall be broken* which they must stay to mend, as *Josh.* ix. 13. [6.] Their arms and ammunition shall all be fixed, and in good posture; *their arrows sharp*, to wound deep, and *all their bows bent*, none unstrung, for they expect to be soon in action. [7.] Their horses and chariots of war shall all be fit for service; their horses so strong, so hardy, that *their hoofs shall be like flint*, far from being beaten, or made tender, by their long march; and the wheels of their chariots not broken, or battered, or out of repair, but swift like a *whirlwind*, turning round so strongly upon their axle-trees. [8.] All the soldiers shall be bold and daring (*v.* 29): *Their roaring*, or shouting, before a battle, *shall be like a lion*, who with his roaring animates himself, and terrifies all about him. Those who would not hear the voice of God speaking to them by his prophets, but stopped their ears against their charms, shall be made to hear the voice of their enemies roaring against them and shall not be able to turn a deaf ear to it. *They shall roar like the roaring of the sea* in a storm; it roars and threatens to swallow up, as the lion roars and threatens to tear in pieces. [9.] There shall not be the least prospect of relief or succour. The enemy shall come in like a flood, and there shall be none to lift up a standard against him. He shall seize the prey, and none shall deliver it, none shall be able to deliver it, nay, none shall so much as dare to attempt the deliverance of it, but shall give it up for lost. Let the distressed look which way they will, every thing appears dismal; for, if God frown upon us, how can any creature smile? *First*, Look round to the earth, to the land, to that land that used to be a land of light and the joy of the whole earth, and *behold darkness and sorrow*, all frightful, all mournful, nothing hopeful. *Secondly*, Look up to heaven, and there the light is darkened, where one would expect to have found it. If the light is darkened in the heavens, how great is that darkness! If God hide his face, no marvel the heavens hide theirs and appear gloomy; *Job* xxxiv. 29. It is our wisdom, by keeping a good conscience, to keep all clear between us and heaven, that we may have light from above even when clouds and darkness are round about us.

## CHAP. VI.

Hitherto, it should seem, Isaiah had prophesied as a candidate, having only a virtual and tacit commission; but here we have him (if I may so speak) solemnly ordained and set apart to the prophetic office by a more express or explicit commission, as his work grew more upon his hands; or perhaps, having seen little success of his ministry, he began to think of giving it up; and therefore God saw fit to renew his commission here in this chapter, in such a manner as might excite and encourage his zeal and industry in the execution of it, though he seemed to labour in vain. In this chapter we have, I. A very awful vision which Isaiah saw of the glory of God (*ver.* 1—4), the terror it put him into (*ver.* 5), and the relief given him against that terror by an assurance of the pardon of his sins, *ver.* 6, 7. II. A very awful commission which Isaiah received to go as a prophet, in God's name (*ver.* 8), by his preaching to harden the impenitent in sin and ripen them for ruin (*ver.* 9—12), yet with a reservation of mercy for a remnant

ver. 13. And it was as to an evangelical prophet that these things were shown him and said to him.

**I**N the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. 2 Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. 3 And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. 4 And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

The vision which Isaiah saw when he was, as is said of Samuel, *established to be a prophet of the Lord* (1 Sam. iii. 20), was intended, 1. To confirm his faith, that he might himself be abundantly satisfied of the truth of those things which should afterwards be made known to him. Thus God opened the communications of himself to him; but such visions needed not to be afterwards repeated upon every revelation. Thus God appeared at first as a God of glory to Abraham (Acts vii. 2), and to Moses, Exod. iii. 2. Ezekiel's prophecies, and St. John's, begin with visions of the divine glory. 2. To work upon his affections, that he might be possessed with such a reverence of God as would both quicken him and fix him to his service. Those who are to teach others the knowledge of God ought to be well acquainted with him themselves.

The vision is dated, for the greater certainty of it. It was in the year that king Uzziah died, who had reigned, for the most part, as prosperously and well as any of the kings of Judah, and reigned very long, above fifty years. About the time that he died Isaiah saw this vision of God upon a throne; for when the breath of princes goes forth, and they return to their earth, this is our comfort, that *the Lord shall reign for ever*, Ps. cxlvi. 3, 4, 10. Israel's king dies, but Israel's God still lives. From the mortality of great and good men we should take occasion to look up with an eye of faith to the King eternal, immortal. King Uzziah died under a cloud, for he was shut up as a leper till the day of his death. As the lives of princes have their periods, so their glory is often eclipsed; but, as God is everliving, so his glory is everlasting. King Uzziah dies in an hospital, but the King of kings still sits upon his throne.

What the prophet here saw is revealed to us, that we, mixing faith with that revelation, may in it, as in a glass, behold the glory of the Lord; let us turn aside therefore, and see this great sight with humble reverence.

I. See God upon his throne, and that throne *high and lifted up*, not only above other thrones, as it transcends them, but over other thrones, as it rules and commands them. Isaiah saw not *Jehovah*—the essence of God (no man has seen that, or can see it), but *Adonai*—his dominion. He saw the Lord Jesus; so this vision is explained John xii. 41, that Isaiah now saw Christ's glory and spoke of him, which is an incontestable proof of the divinity of our Saviour. He it is who when, after his resurrection, he sat down on the right hand of God, did but sit down where he was before, John xvii. 5. See the rest of the Eternal Mind: *Isaiah saw the Lord sitting*, Ps. xxix. 10. See the sovereignty of the Eternal Monarch: he sits *upon a throne*—a throne of glory, before which we must worship,—a throne of government, under which we must be subject,—and a throne of grace, to which we may come boldly. This throne is high, and lifted up above all competition and contradiction.

II. See his temple, his church on earth, filled with the manifestations of his glory. His throne being erected at the door of the temple (as princes sat in judgment at the gates), *his train*, the skirts of his robes, *filled the temple*, the whole world (for it is all God's temple, and, as the heaven is his throne, so the earth is his footstool), or rather the church, which is filled, enriched, and beautified with the tokens of God's special presence.

III. See the bright and blessed attendants on his throne, in and by whom his glory is celebrated and his government served (v. 2): *Above the throne*, as it were hovering about it, or nigh to the throne, bowing before it, with an eye to it, *the seraphim stood*, the holy angels, who are called *seraphim*—burners; for he *makes his ministers a flaming fire*, Ps. civ. 4. They burn in love to God, and zeal for his glory and against sin, and he makes use of them as instruments of his wrath when he is a consuming fire to his enemies. Whether they were only two or four, or (as I rather think) an innumerable company of angels, that Isaiah saw, is uncertain; see Dan. vii. 10. Note, It is the glory of the angels that they are seraphim, have heat proportionable to their light, have abundance, not only of divine knowledge, but of holy love. Special notice is taken of their wings (and of no other part of their appearance), because of the use they made of them, which is designed for instruction to us. They had *each of them six wings*, not stretched upwards (as those whom Ezekiel saw, ch. i. 11), but, 1. Four were made use of for covering, as the wings of a fowl, sitting, are; with the two upper wings, next the head, they covered their faces, and with the two lowest wings they covered their feet, or lower parts. This bespeaks their great humility and reverence



in their attendance upon God, for he is greatly feared in the assembly of those saints, Ps. lxxxix. 7. They not only cover their feet, those members of the body which are less honourable (1 Cor. xii. 23), but even their faces. Though angels' faces, doubtless, are much fairer than those of the children of men (Acts vi. 15), yet, in the presence of God, they cover them, because they cannot bear the dazzling lustre of the divine glory, and because, being conscious of an infinite distance from the divine perfection, they are ashamed to show their faces before the holy God, who charges even his angels with folly if they should offer to vie with him, Job iv. 18. If angels be thus reverent in their attendance on God, with what godly fear should we approach his throne! Else we do not the will of God as the angels do it. Yet Moses, when he went into the mount with God, took the veil from off his face. See 2 Cor. iii. 18. 2. Two were made use of for flight; when they are sent on God's errands they fly swiftly (Dan. ix. 21), more swiftly with their own wings than if they flew on the wings of the wind. This teaches us to do the work of God with cheerfulness and expedition. Do angels come upon the wing from heaven to earth, to minister for our good, and shall not we soar upon the wing from earth to heaven, to share with them in their glory? Luke xx. 36.

IV. Hear the anthem, or song of praise, which the angels sing to the honour of him that sits on the throne, v. 3. Observe,

1. How this song was sung. With zeal and fervency—they cried aloud; and with unanimity—they cried one to another, or one with another; they sang alternately, but in concert, and without the least jarring voice to interrupt the harmony.

2. What the song was; it is the same with that which is sung by the four living creatures, Rev. iv. 8. Note, Praising God always was, and will be to eternity, the work of heaven, and the constant employment of blessed spirits above, Ps. lxxxiv. 4. Note further, The church above is the same in its praises; there is no change of times or notes there. Two things the seraphim here give God the praise of:—

(1.) His infinite perfections in himself. Here is one of his most glorious titles praised: he is the Lord of hosts, of their hosts, of all hosts; and one of his most glorious attributes, his holiness, without which his being the Lord of hosts (or, as it is in the parallel place, Rev. iv. 8, the Lord God Almighty) could not be so much as it is the matter of our joy and praise; for power, without purity to guide it, would be a terror to mankind. None of all the divine attributes is so celebrated in scripture as this is. God's power was spoken twice (Ps. lxii. 11), but his holiness thrice, *Holy, holy, holy*. This bespeaks, [1.] The zeal and fervency

of the angels in praising God; they even want words to express themselves, and therefore repeat the same again. [2.] The particular pleasure they take in contemplating the holiness of God; this is a subject they love to dwell upon, to harp upon, and are loth to leave. [3.] The superlative excellency of God's holiness, above that of the purest creatures. He is holy, thrice holy, infinitely holy, originally, perfectly, and eternally so. [4.] It may refer to the three persons in the Godhead, Holy Father, Holy Son, and Holy Spirit (for it follows, v. 8, *Who will go for us?*) or perhaps to *that which was, and is, and is to come*; for that title of God's honour is added to this song, Rev. iv. 8. Some make the angels here to applaud the equity of that sentence which God was now about to pronounce upon the Jewish nation. Herein he was, and is, and will be, holy; his ways are equal.

(2.) The manifestation of these to the children of men: *The earth is full of his glory*, of the glory of his power and purity; for he is holy in all his works, Ps. cxlv. 17. The Jews thought the glory of God should be confined to their land; but it is here intimated that in gospel times (which are pointed to in this chapter) the glory of God should fill all the earth, the glory of his holiness, which is indeed the glory of all his other attributes; this then filled the temple (v. 1), but, in the latter days, the earth shall be full of it.

V. Observe the marks and tokens of terror with which the temple was filled, upon this vision of the divine glory, v. 4. 1. The house was shaken; not only the door, but even the posts of the door, which were firmly fixed, moved at the voice of him that cried, at the voice of God, who called to judgment (Ps. l. 4), at the voice of the angel, who praised him. There are voices in heaven sufficient to drown all the noises of the many waters in this lower world, Ps. xciii. 3, 4. This violent concussion of the temple was an indication of God's wrath and displeasure against the people for their sins; it was an earnest of the destruction of it and the city by the Babylonians first, and afterwards by the Romans; and it was designed to strike an awe upon us. Shall walls and posts tremble before God, and shall not we tremble? 2. The house was darkened; it was filled with smoke, which was as a cloud spread upon the face of his throne (Job xxvi. 9); we cannot take a full view of it, nor order our speech concerning it, by reason of darkness. In the temple above there will be no smoke, but every thing will be seen clearly. There God dwells in light; here he makes darkness his pavilion, 2 Chron. vi. 1.

5 Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine

eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. 6 Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, *which* he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: 7 And he laid *it* upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. 8 Also I heard the voice of the LORD, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here *am* I; send me.

Our curiosity would lead us to enquire further concerning the seraphim, their songs, and their services; but here we leave them, and must attend to what passed between God and his prophet. *Secret things belong not to us*, the secret things of the world of angels, but things revealed to and by the prophets, which concern the administration of God's kingdom among men. Now here we have,

I. The consternation that the prophet was put into by the vision which he saw of the glory of God (v. 5): *Then said I, Woe is me!* I should have said, "Blessed art thou, who hast been thus highly favoured, highly honoured, and dignified, for a time, with the privilege of those glorious beings that *always behold the face of our Father*. Blessed were those eyes which saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and those ears which heard the angels' praises." And, one would think, he should have said, "Happy am I, for ever happy; nothing now shall trouble me, nothing make me blush or tremble;" but, on the contrary, he cries out, "*Woe is me! for I am undone*. Alas for me! I am a gone man; *I shall surely die* (Judges xiii. 22; vi. 22); I am silenced; I am struck dumb, struck dead." Thus Daniel, when he heard the words of the angel, *became dumb*, and there was *no strength, no breath, left in him*, Dan. x. 15, 17. Observe,

1. What the prophet reflected upon in himself which terrified him: "*I am undone* if God deal with me in strict justice, for I have made myself obnoxious to his displeasure, *because I am a man of unclean lips*." Some think he refers particularly to some rash word he had spoken, or to his sinful silence in not reproving sin with the boldness and freedom that were necessary—a sin which God's ministers have too much cause to charge themselves with, and to blush at the remembrance of. But it may be taken more generally: *I am a sinner*; particularly, *I have offended in word*; and who is there that hath not? Jam. iii. 2. We all have reason to bewail it before the Lord, (1.) That we are of unclean lips ourselves; our lips are not consecrated to God; he has not had the *first-fruits of our lips* (Heb. xiii. 15), and therefore they are

counted common and unclean, *uncircumcised lips*, Exod. vi. 30. Nay, they have been polluted with sin. We have spoken the language of an unclean heart, that evil communication which corrupts good manners, and whereby many have been defiled. We are unworthy and unmeet to take God's name into our lips. With what a pure lip did the angels praise God! "But," says the prophet, "I cannot praise him so, for *I am a man of unclean lips*." The best men in the world have reason to be ashamed of themselves, and the best of their services, when they come into comparison with the holy angels. The angels had celebrated the purity and holiness of God; and therefore the prophet, when he reflects upon sin, calls it *uncleanness*; for the sinfulness of sin is its contrariety to the holy nature of God, and upon that account especially it should appear both hateful and frightful to us. The impurity of our lips ought to be the grief of our souls, for by our words we shall be justified or condemned. (2.) That we dwell among those who are so too. We have reason to lament not only that we ourselves are polluted, but that the nature and race of mankind are so; the disease is hereditary and epidemic, which is so far from lessening our guilt that it should rather increase our grief, especially considering that we have not done what we might have done for the cleansing of the pollution of other people's lips; nay, we have rather learned their way and spoken their language, as Joseph in Egypt learned the courtier's oath, Gen. xlii. 16. "*I dwell in the midst of a people* who by their impudent sinnings are pulling down desolating judgments upon the land, which I, who am a sinner too, may justly expect to be involved in."

2. What gave occasion for these sad reflections at this time: *My eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts*. He saw God's sovereignty to be incontestable—he is the King; and his power irresistible—he is the Lord of hosts. These are comfortable truths to God's people, and yet they ought to strike an awe upon us. Note, A believing sight of God's glorious majesty should affect us all with reverence and godly fear. We have reason to be abased in the sense of that infinite distance that there is between us and God, and our own sinfulness and vileness before him, and to be afraid of his displeasure. We are undone if there be not a Mediator between us and this holy God, 1 Sam. vi. 20. Isaiah was thus humbled, to prepare him for the honour he was now to be called to as a prophet. Note, Those are fittest to be employed for God who are low in their own eyes and are made deeply sensible of their own weakness and unworthiness.

II. The silencing of the prophet's fears by the good words, and comfortable words, with which the angel answered him, v. 6, 7.



One of the seraphim immediately flew to him, to purify him, and so to pacify him. Note, God has strong consolations ready for holy mourners. Those that humble themselves in penitential shame and fear shall soon be encouraged and exalted; those that are struck down with the visions of God's glory shall soon be raised up again with the visits of his grace; he that tears will heal. Note further, Angels are ministering spirits for the good of the saints, for their spiritual good. Here was one of the seraphim dismissed, for a time, from attending on the throne of God's glory, to be a messenger of his grace to a good man; and so well pleased was he with the office that he came flying to him. To our Lord Jesus himself, in his agony, there appeared an angel from heaven, strengthening him, Luke xxii. 43. Here is, 1. A comfortable sign given to the prophet of the purging away of his sin. The seraph brought a live coal from the altar, and touched his lips with it, not to hurt them, but to heal them—not to cauterize, but to cleanse them; for there were purifications by fire, as well as by water, and the filth of Jerusalem was purged by the spirit of burning, ch. iv. 4. The blessed Spirit works as fire, Matt. iii. 11. The seraph, being himself kindled with a divine fire, put life into the prophet, to make him also zealously affected; for the way to purge the lips from the uncleanness of sin is to fire the soul with the love of God. This live coal was taken from off the altar, either the altar of incense or that of burnt-offerings, for they had both of them fire burning on them continually. Nothing is powerful to cleanse and comfort the soul but what is taken from Christ's satisfaction and the intercession he ever lives to make in the virtue of that satisfaction. It must be a coal from his altar that must put life into us and be our peace; it will not be done with strange fire. 2. An explication of this sign: "*Lo, this has touched thy lips, to assure thee of this, that thy iniquity is taken away and thy sin purged.*" The guilt of thy sin is removed by pardoning mercy, the guilt of thy tongue-sins. Thy corrupt disposition to sin is removed by renewing grace; and therefore nothing can hinder thee from being accepted with God as a worshipper, in concert with the holy angels, or from being employed for God as a messenger to the children of men." Those only who are thus purged from an evil conscience are prepared to serve the living God, Heb. ix. 14. The taking away of sin is necessary to our speaking with confidence and comfort either to God in prayer or from God in preaching; nor are any so fit to display to others the riches and power of gospel-grace as those who have themselves tasted the sweetness and felt the influence of that grace; and those shall have their sin taken away who complain of it as a burden and see themselves in danger of being undone by it.

III. The renewing of the prophet's mission, v. 8. Here is a communication between God and Isaiah about this matter. Those that would assist others in their correspondence with God must not themselves be strangers to it; for how can we expect that God should speak by us if we never heard him speaking to us, or that we should be accepted as the mouth of others to God if we never spoke to him heartily for ourselves? Observe here,

1. The counsel of God concerning Isaiah's mission. God is here brought in, after the manner of men, deliberating and advising with himself: *Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?* God needs not either to be counselled by others or to consult with himself; he knows what he will do; but thus he would show us that there is a counsel in his whole will, and teach us to consider our ways, and particularly that the sending forth of ministers is a work not to be done but upon mature deliberation. Observe, (1.) Who it is that is consulting. It is the Lord God in his glory, whom he saw upon the throne high and lifted up. It puts an honour upon the ministry that, when God would send a prophet to speak in his name, he appeared in all the glories of the upper world. Ministers are the ambassadors of the King of kings; how mean soever they are, he who sends them is great; it is God in three persons (Who will go for us? as Gen. i. 26, *Let us make man*), Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. They all concur, as in the creating, so in the redeeming and governing of man. Ministers are ordained in the same name into which all Christians are baptized. (2.) What the consultation is: *Whom shall I send? And who will go?* Some think this refers to the particular message of wrath against Israel, v. 9, 10. "Who will be willing to go on such a melancholy errand, on which they will go in the bitterness of their souls?" Ezek. iii. 14. But I rather take it more largely for all those messages which the prophet was entrusted to deliver, in God's name, to that people, in which that hardening work was by no means the primary intention, but a secondary effect of them, 2 Cor. ii. 16. *Whom shall I send?* intimating that the business was such as required a choice and well-accomplished messenger, Jer. xlix. 19. God now appeared, attended with holy angels, and yet asks, *Whom shall I send?* For he would send them a prophet from among their brethren, Heb. ii. 17. Note, [1.] It is the unspeakable favour of God to us that he is pleased to send us his mind by men like ourselves, whose terror shall not make us afraid, and who are themselves concerned in the messages they bring. Those who are workers together with God are sinners and sufferers together with us. [2.] It is a rare thing to find one who is fit to go for God, and to carry his messages to

the children of men: *Whom shall I send?* Who is sufficient? Such a degree of courage for God and concern for the souls of men as is necessary to make a man faithful, and withal such an insight into the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven as is necessary to make a man skilful, are seldom to be met with. Such an interpreter of the mind of God is one of a thousand, Job xxxiii. 23. [3.] None are allowed to go for God but those who are sent by him; he will own none but those whom he appoints, Rom. x. 15. It is Christ's work to put men into the ministry, 1 Tim. i. 12.

2. The consent of Isaiah to it: *Then said I, Here am I; send me.* He was to go on a melancholy errand; the office seemed to go a begging, and every body declined it, and yet Isaiah offered himself to the service. It is an honour to be singular in appearing for God, Judges v. 7. We must not say, "I would go if I thought I should have success;" but, "I will go, and leave the success to God. Here am I; send me." Isaiah had been himself in a melancholy frame (v. 5), full of doubts and fears; but now that he had the assurance of the pardon of his sin the clouds were blown over, and he was fit for service and forward to it. What he says denotes, (1.) His readiness: "Here am I, a volunteer, not pressed into the service." *Behold me*; so the word is. God says to us, *Behold me* (ch. lxxv. 1), and, *Here I am* (ch. lvi. 9), even before we call; let us say so to him when he does call. (2.) His resolution: "*Here I am*, ready to encounter the greatest difficulties. *I have set my face as a flint.*" Compare this with ch. 1. 4—7. (3.) His referring himself to God: "Send me whither thou wilt; make what use thou pleasest of me. Send me, that is, Lord, give me commission and full instruction; send me, and then, no doubt, thou wilt stand by me." It is a great comfort to those whom God sends that they go for God, and may therefore speak in his name, as having authority, and be assured that he will bear them out.

9 And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. 10 Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed. 11 Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, 12 And the LORD have removed men far away, and *there be a great forsaking in the midst of*

the land. 13 But yet in it *shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil-tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof.*

God takes Isaiah at his word, and here sends him on a strange errand—to foretel the ruin of his people and even to ripen them for that ruin—to preach that which, by their abuse of it, would be to them a savour of death unto death. And this was to be a type and figure of the state of the Jewish church in the days of the Messiah, when they should obstinately reject the gospel, and should thereupon be rejected of God. These verses are quoted in part, or referred to, six times, in the New Testament, which intimates that in gospel times these spiritual judgments would be most frequently inflicted; and though they make the least noise, and come not with observation, yet they are of all judgments the most dreadful. Isaiah is here given to understand these four things:—

1. That the generality of the people to whom he was sent would turn a deaf ear to his preaching, and wilfully shut their eyes against all the discoveries of the mind and will of God which he had to make to them (v. 9): "*Go, and tell this people, this foolish wretched people, tell them their own, tell them how stupid and sottish they are.*" Isaiah must preach to them, and they will hear him indeed, but that is all; they will not heed him; they will not understand him; they will not take any pains, nor use that application of mind which is necessary to the understanding of him; they are prejudiced against that which is the true intent and meaning of what he says, and therefore they will not understand him, or pretend they do not. They see indeed (for the vision is made plain on tables, so that he who runs may read it); *but they perceive not* their own concern in it; it is to them as a tale that is told. Note, There are many who hear the sound of God's word, but do not feel the power of it.

2. That, forasmuch as they would not be made better by his ministry, they should be made worse by it; those that were wilfully blind should be judicially blinded (v. 10): "They will not understand or perceive thee, and therefore thou shalt be instrumental to *make their heart fat*, senseless, and sensual, and so to *make their ears yet more heavy*, and to *shut their eyes* the closer; so that, at length, their recovery and repentance will become utterly impossible; they shall no more see with their eyes the danger they are in, the ruin they are upon the brink of, nor the way of escape from it; they shall no more hear with their ears the warnings and instructions that are given them, nor understand with their heart the things that belong



to their peace, so as to be converted from the error of their ways, and thus *be healed*." Note, (1.) The conversion of sinners is the healing of them. (2.) A right understanding is necessary to conversion. (3.) God sometimes, in a way of righteous judgment, gives men up to blindness of mind and strong delusions, because they would not *receive the truth in the love of it*, 2 Thess. ii. 10—12. *He that is filthy let him be filthy still*. (4.) Even the word of God oftentimes proves a means of hardening sinners. The evangelical prophet himself makes the heart of this people fat, not only as he foretels it, passing this sentence upon them in God's name, and seals them under it, but as his preaching had a tendency to it, rocking some asleep in security (to whom it was a lovely song), and making others more outrageous, to whom it was such a reproach that they were not able to bear it. Some looked upon the word as a privilege, and their convictions were smothered by it (Jer. vii. 4); others looked upon it as a provocation, and their corruptions were exasperated by it.

3. That the consequence of this would be their *utter ruin*, v. 11, 12. The prophet had nothing to object against the justice of this sentence, nor does he refuse to go upon such an errand, but asks, "*Lord, how long?*" (an abrupt question): "Shall it always be thus? Must I and other prophets always labour in vain among them, and will things never be better?" Or (as should seem by the answer) "Lord, what will it come to at last? What will be in the end hereof?" In answer to this he is told that it should issue in the final destruction of the Jewish church and nation. "When the word of God, especially the word of the gospel, has been thus abused by them, they shall be unchurched, and consequently undone. Their cities shall be uninhabited, and their country houses too; the land shall be untilled, *desolate with desolation* (as it is in the margin), the people who should replenish the houses and cultivate the ground being all cut off by sword, famine, or pestilence, and those who escape with their lives being removed far away into captivity, so that there shall be a great and general forsaking in the midst of the land; that populous country shall become desert, and that glory of all lands shall be abandoned." Note, Spiritual judgments often bring temporal judgments along with them upon persons and places. This was in part fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, when the land, being left desolate, enjoyed her sabbaths seventy years; but, the foregoing predictions being so expressly applied in the New Testament to the Jews in our Saviour's time, doubtless this points at the final destruction of that people by the Romans, in which it had a complete accomplishment, and the effects of it that people and that land remain under to this day.

4. That yet a remnant should be reserved to be the monuments of mercy, v. 13. There was a remnant reserved in the last destruction of the Jewish nation (Rom. xi. 5, *At this present time there is a remnant*); for so it was written here: *But in it shall be a tenth*, a certain number, but a very small number in comparison with the multitude that shall perish in their unbelief. It is that which, under the law, was God's proportion; they shall be consecrated to God as the tithes were, and shall be for his service and honour. Concerning this tithe, this saved remnant, we are here told, (1.) That they shall return (ch. vi. 13; x. 21), shall return from sin to God and duty, shall return out of captivity to their own land. God will turn them, and they shall be turned. (2.) That they shall be eaten, that is, shall be accepted of God as the tithe was, which was meat in God's house, Mal. iii. 10. The saving of this remnant shall be meat to the faith and hope of those that wish well to God's kingdom. (3.) That they shall be like a timber-tree in winter, which has life, though it has no leaves: *As a teil-tree and as an oak, whose substance is in them even when they cast their leaves*, so this remnant, though they may be stripped of their outward prosperity and share with others in common calamities, shall yet recover themselves, as a tree in the spring, and flourish again; though they fall, they shall not be utterly cast down. *There is hope of a tree, though it be cut down, that it will sprout again*, Job xiv. 7. (4.) That this distinguished remnant shall be the stay and support of the public interests. *The holy seed in the soul is the substance of the man*; a principle of grace reigning in the heart will keep life there; he that is *born of God* has *his seed remaining in him*, 1 John iii. 9. So the holy seed in the land is the substance of the land, keeps it from being quite dissolved, and bears up the pillars of it, Ps. lxxv. 3. See ch. i. 9. Some read the foregoing clause with this, thus: *As the support at Shallecheth is in the elms and the oaks, so the holy seed is the substance thereof*; as the trees that grow on either side of the causeway (the raised way, or terrace-walk, that leads from the king's palace to the temple (1 Kings x. 5), at the gate of Shallecheth, 1 Chron. xxvi. 16) support the causeway by keeping up the earth, which would otherwise be crumbling away, so the small residue of religious, serious, praying people, are the support of the state, and help to keep things together and save them from going to decay. Some make the holy seed to be Christ. The Jewish nation was therefore saved from utter ruin because *out of it, as concerning the flesh, Christ was to come*, Rom. ix. 5. *Destroy it not, for that blessing is in it* (ch. lxxv. 8); and, when that blessing had come, it was soon destroyed. Now the consideration of this is designed for the

support of the prophet in his work. Though far the greater part should perish in their unbelief, yet to some his word should be a savour of life unto life. Ministers do not wholly lose their labour if they be but instrumental to save one poor soul.

## CHAP. VII.

This chapter is an occasional sermon, in which the prophet sings both of mercy and judgment to those that did not perceive or understand either; he piped unto them, but they danced not, mourned unto them, but they wept not. Here is, I. The consternation that Ahaz was in upon an attempt of the confederate forces of Syria and Israel against Jerusalem, ver. 1, 2. II. The assurance which God, by the prophet, sent him for his encouragement, that the attempt should be defeated and Jerusalem should be preserved, ver. 3—9. III. The confirmation of this by a sign which God gave to Ahaz, when he refused to ask one, referring to Christ, and our redemption by him, ver. 10—16. IV. A threatening of the great desolation that God would bring upon Ahaz and his kingdom by the Assyrians, notwithstanding their escape from this present storm, because they went on still in their wickedness. ver. 17—25. And this is written both for our comfort and for our admonition.

AND it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up toward Jerusalem to war against it, but could not prevail against it. 2 And it was told the house of David, saying, Syria is confederate with Ephraim. And his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind. 3 Then said the LORD unto Isaiah, Go forth now to meet Ahaz, thou, and Shear-jashub thy son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field; 4 And say unto him, Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be fainthearted for the two tails of these smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin with Syria, and of the son of Remaliah. 5 Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah, have taken evil counsel against thee, saying, 6 Let us go up against Judah, and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeal: 7 Thus saith the Lord God, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass. 8 For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin; and within three-score and five years shall Ephraim be broken, that it be not a people. 9 And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son. If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.

The prophet Isaiah had his commission renewed in the year that king Uzziah died, *ch. vi.* 1. Jotham his son reigned, and reigned well, sixteen years. All that time, no doubt, Isaiah prophesied as he was commanded, and yet we have not in this book any of his prophecies dated in the reign of Jotham; but this, which is put first, was in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham. Many excellent useful sermons he preached which were not published and left upon record; for, if all that was memorable had been written, *the world could not have contained the books*, John xxi. 25. Perhaps in the reign of Ahaz, a wicked king, he had not opportunity to preach so much at court as in Jotham's time, and therefore then he wrote the more, for a testimony against them. Here is,

I. A very formidable design laid against Jerusalem by Rezin king of Syria and Pekah king of Israel, two neighbouring potentates, who had of late made descents upon Judah severally. At the end of the reign of Jotham, *the Lord began to send against Judah Rezin and Pekah*, 2 Kings xv. 37. But now, in the second or third year of the reign of Ahaz, encouraged by their former successes, they entered into an alliance against Judah. Because Ahaz, though he found the sword over his head, began his reign with idolatry, *God delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria and of the king of Israel* (2 Chron. xxviii. 5), and a great slaughter they made in his kingdom, *v. 6, 7*. Flushed with this victory, they went up towards Jerusalem, the royal city, to war against it, to besiege it, and make themselves masters of it; but it proved in the issue that they could not gain their point. Note, The sin of a land brings foreign invasions upon it and betrays the most advantageous posts and passes to the enemy; and God sometimes makes one wicked nation a scourge to another; but judgment, ordinarily, begins at the house of God.

II. The great distress that Ahaz and his court were in when they received advice of this design: *It was told the house of David* that Syria and Ephraim had signed a league against Judah, *v. 2*. This degenerate royal family is called the *house of David*, to put us in mind of that article of God's covenant with David (Ps. lxxxix. 30—33), *If his children forsake my law, I will chasten their transgression with the rod; but my loving-kindness will I not utterly take away*, which is remarkably fulfilled in this chapter. News being brought that the two armies of Syria and Israel were joined, and had taken the field, the court, the city, and the country, were thrown into consternation: *The heart of Ahaz was moved with fear*, and then no wonder that *the heart of his people was so, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind*. They were tossed and shaken, and put into a great disorder and confusion, were



wavering and uncertain in their counsels, hurried hither and thither, and could not fix in any steady resolution. They yielded to the storm, and gave up all for gone, concluding it in vain to make any resistance. Now that which caused this fright was the sense of guilt and the weakness of their faith. They had made God their enemy, and knew not how to make him their friend, and therefore their fears tyrannised over them; while those whose consciences are kept void of offence, and whose hearts are fixed, trusting in God, need not be afraid of evil tidings; though the earth be removed, yet will not they fear; but the wicked flee at the shaking of a leaf, Lev. xxvi. 36.

III. The orders and directions given to Isaiah to go and encourage Ahaz in his distress; not for his own sake (he deserved to hear nothing from God but words of terror, which might add affliction to his grief), but because he was a son of David and king of Judah. God had kindness for him for his father's sake, who must not be forgotten, and for his people's sake, who must not be abandoned, but would be encouraged if Ahaz were. Observe,

1. God appointed the prophet to meet Ahaz, though he did not send to the prophet to speak with him, nor desire him to enquire of the Lord for him (v. 3): *Go to meet Ahaz*. Note, God is often found of those who seek him not, much more will he be found of those who seek him diligently. He speaks comfort to many who not only are not worthy of it, but do not so much as enquire after it.

2. He ordered him to take his little son with him, because he carried a sermon in his name, *Shear-jashub—A remnant shall return*. The prophets sometimes recorded what they preached in the significant names of their children (as Hos. i. 4, 6, 9); therefore Isaiah's children are said to be *for signs*, ch. viii. 18. This son was so called for the encouragement of those of God's people who were carried captive, assuring them that they should return, at least a remnant of them, which was more than they could pretend to merit: yet at this time God was better than his word; for he took care not only that a remnant should return, but the whole number of those whom the confederate forces of Syria and Israel had taken prisoners, 2 Chron. xxviii. 15.

3. He directed him where he should find Ahaz. He was to meet with him not in the temple, or the synagogue, or royal chapel, but *at the end of the conduit of the upper pool*, where he was, probably with many of his servants about him, contriving how to order the water-works, so as to secure them to the city, or deprive the enemy of the benefit of them (ch. xxii. 9—11; 2 Chron. xxxii. 3, 4), or giving some necessary directions for the fortifying of the city as well as they could; and perhaps finding every thing

in a very bad posture of defence, the conduit out of repair, as well as other things gone to decay, his fears increased, and he was now in greater perplexity than ever; therefore, *Go, meet him there*. Note, God sometimes sends comforts to his people very seasonably, and, what time they are most afraid, encourages them to trust in him.

4. He put words in his mouth, else the prophet would not have known how to bring a message of good to such a bad man, a sinner in Zion, that ought to be afraid; but God intended it for the support of faithful Israelites.

(1.) The prophet must rebuke their fears, and advise them by no means to yield to them, but keep their temper, and preserve the possession of their own souls (v. 4): *Take heed, and be quiet*. Note, In order to comfort there is need of caution; that we may be quiet, it is necessary that we take heed and watch against those things that threaten to disquiet us. "Fear not with this amazement, this fear, that weakens, and has torment; neither *let thy heart be tender*, so as to melt and fail within thee; but pluck up thy spirits, have a good heart on it, and be courageous; let not fear betray the succours which reason and religion offer for thy support." Note, Those who expect God should help them must help themselves, Ps. xxvii. 14.

(2.) He must teach them to despise their enemies, not in pride, or security, or incogitancy (nothing more dangerous than so to despise an enemy), but in faith and dependence upon God. Ahaz's fear called them two powerful politic princes, for either of whom he was an unequal match, but, if united, he durst not look them in the face, nor make head against them. "No," says the prophet, "they are two *tails of smoking firebrands*; they are angry, they are fierce, they are furious, as firebrands, as fireballs; and they make one another worse by being in a confederacy, as sticks of fire put together burn the more violently. But they are only smoking firebrands: and where there is smoke there is some fire, but it may be not so much as was feared. Their threatenings will vanish into smoke. *Pharaoh king of Egypt is but a noise* (Jer. xli. 17), and Rezin king of Syria but a smoke; and such are all the enemies of God's church, *smoking flax*, that will soon be quenched. Nay, they are but *tails of smoking firebrands*, in a manner burnt out already; their force is spent; they have consumed themselves with the heat of their own anger; you may put your foot on them, and tread them out." The two kingdoms of Syria and Israel were now near expiring. Note, The more we have an eye to God as a consuming fire the less reason we shall have to fear men, though they are ever so furious, nay, we shall be able to despise them as smoking firebrands.

(3.) He must assure them that the present

design of these high allies (so they thought themselves) against Jerusalem should certainly be defeated and come to nothing, *v. 5—7*. [1.] That very thing which Ahaz thought most formidable is made the ground of their defeat—and that was the depth of their designs and the height of their hopes: “*Therefore they shall be baffled and sent back with shame, because they have taken evil counsel against thee*, which is an offence to God. These firebrands are a smoke in his nose (*ch. lxv. 5*), and therefore must be extinguished.” First, They are very spiteful and malicious, and therefore they shall not prosper. Judah had done them no wrong; they had no pretence to quarrel with Ahaz; but, without any reason, they said, *Let us go up against Judah, and vex it*. Note, Those that are vexatious cannot expect to be prosperous; those that love to do mischief cannot expect to do well. Secondly, They are very secure, and confident of success. They will vex Judah by going up against it; yet that is not all: they do not doubt but to make a breach in the wall of Jerusalem wide enough for them to march their army in at; or they count upon dissecting or dividing the kingdom into two parts, one for the king of Israel, the other for the king of Syria, who had agreed in one viceroy—a king to be set in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeal, some obscure person, it is uncertain whether a Syrian or an Israelite. So sure were they of gaining their point that they divided the prey before they had caught it. Note, Those that are most scornful are commonly least successful, for surely God scorns the scornors. [2.] God himself gives them his word that the attempt should not take effect (*v. 7*): “*Thus saith the Lord God, the sovereign Lord of all, who brings the counsel of the heathen to nought* (*Ps. xxxiii. 10*), *It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass*; their measures shall all be broken, and they shall not be able to bring to pass their enterprise.” Note, Whatever stands against God, or thinks to stand without him, cannot stand long. Man purposes, but God disposes; and *who is he that saith and it cometh to pass if the Lord commands it not or countermands it?* Lam. iii. 37. See Prov. xix. 21.

(4.) He must give them a prospect of the destruction of these enemies, at last, that were now such a terror to them. [1.] They should neither of them enlarge their dominions, nor push their conquests any further: *The head city of Syria is Damascus, and the head man of Damascus is Rezin*; this he glories in, and this let him be content with, *v. 8*. *The head city of Ephraim has long been Samaria, and the head man in Samaria is now Pekah the son of Remaliah*. These shall be made to know their own; their bounds are fixed, and they shall not pass them, to make themselves masters of the cities of Judah, much less to make

Jerusalem their prey. Note, As God has appointed men the bounds of their habitation (*Acts xvii. 26*), so he has appointed princes the bounds of their dominion, within which they ought to confine themselves, and not encroach upon their neighbours' rights. [2.] Ephraim, which perhaps was the more malicious and forward enemy of the two, should shortly be quite rooted out, and should be so far from seizing other people's lands that they should not be able to hold their own. Interpreters are much at a loss how to compute the sixty-five years within which *Ephraim shall cease to be a people*; for the captivity of the ten tribes was but eleven years after this: and some make it a mistake of the transcriber, and think it should be read *within six and five years*, just eleven. But it is hard to allow that. Others make it to be sixty-five years from the time that the prophet Amos first foretold the ruin of the kingdom of the ten tribes; and some late interpreters make it to look as far forward as the last desolation of that country by Esarhaddon, which was about sixty-five years after this; then Ephraim was so broken that it was no more a people. Now it was the greatest folly in the world for those to be ruining their neighbours who were themselves marked for ruin, and so near to it. See what a prophet told them at this time, when they were triumphing over Judah, *2 Chron. xxviii. 10*. *Are there not with you, even with you, sins against the Lord your God?*

(5.) He must urge them to mix faith with those assurances which he had given them (*v. 9*): “*If you will not believe what is said to you, surely you shall not be established*; your shaken and disordered state shall not be established, your unquiet unsettled spirit shall not; though the things told you are very encouraging, yet they will not be so to you, unless you believe them, and be willing to take God's word.” Note, The grace of faith is absolutely necessary to the quieting and composing of the mind in the midst of all the tosses of this present time, *2 Chron. xx. 20*.

10 Moreover the LORD spake again unto Ahaz, saying, 11 Ask thee a sign of the LORD thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above. 12 But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the LORD. 13 And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David; *Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?* 14 Therefore the LORD himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. 15 Butter and



honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. 16 For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.

Here, I. God, by the prophet, makes a gracious offer to Ahaz, to confirm the foregoing predictions, and his faith in them, by such sign or miracle as he should choose (v. 10, 11): *Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God*. See here the divine faithfulness and veracity. God tells us nothing but what he is able and ready to prove. See his wonderful condescension to the children of men, in that he is so *willing to show to the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel*, Heb. vi. 17. He considers our frame, and that, living in a world of sense, we are apt to require sensible proofs, which therefore he has favoured us with in sacramental signs and seals. Ahaz was a bad man, yet God is called the Lord his God, because he was a child of Abraham and David, and of the covenants made with them. See how gracious God is even to the evil and unthankful; Ahaz is bidden to choose his sign, as Gideon about the fleece (Judg. vi. 37); let him ask for a sign in the air, or earth, or water, for God's power is the same in all.

II. Ahaz rudely refuses this gracious offer, and (which is not mannerly towards any superior) kicks at the courtesy, and puts a slight upon it (v. 12): *I will not ask*. The true reason why he would not ask for a sign was because, having a dependence upon the Assyrians, their forces, and their gods, for help, he would not thus far be beholden to the God of Israel, or lay himself under obligations to him. He would not ask a sign for the confirming of his faith because he resolved to persist in his unbelief, and would indulge his doubts and distrusts; yet he pretends a pious reason: *I will not tempt the Lord*; as if it would be a tempting of God to do that which God himself invited and directed him to do. Note, A secret disaffection to God is often disguised with the specious colours of respect to him; and those who are resolved that they will not trust God yet pretend that they will not tempt him.

III. The prophet reproves him and his court, him and the house of David, the whole royal family, for their contempt of prophecy, and the little value they had for divine revelation (v. 13): *"Is it a small thing for you to weary men by your oppression and tyranny, with which you make yourselves burdensome and odious to all mankind? But will you weary my God also with the affronts you put upon him?"* As the unjust judge that neither feared God nor regarded man, Luke xviii. 2. *You have wearied the Lord with your words*, Mal. ii. 17. Nothing is

more grievous to the God of heaven than to be distrusted. *"Will you weary my God?"* Will you suppose him to be tired and unable to help you, or to be weary of doing you good? Whereas the youths may faint and be weary, you may have tired all your friends, the Creator of the ends of the earth faints not, neither is weary." ch. xl. 28—31. Or thus: "In affronting the prophets, you think you put a slight only upon men like yourselves, and consider not that you affront God himself, whose messengers they are, and put a slight upon him, who will resent it accordingly." The prophet here calls God his God with a great deal of pleasure: Ahaz would not say, He is my God, though the prophet had invited him to say so (v. 11): *The Lord thy God*; but Isaiah will say, "He is mine." Note, Whatever others do, we must avouch the Lord for ours and abide by him.

IV. The prophet, in God's name, gives them a sign: "You will not ask a sign, but the unbelief of man shall not make the promise of God of no effect: *The Lord himself shall give you a sign* (v. 14), a double sign."

1. "A sign in general of his good-will to Israel and to the house of David. You may conclude that he has mercy in store for you, and that you are not forsaken of your God, how great soever your present distress and danger are; for of your nation, of your family, the Messiah is to be born, and you cannot be destroyed while that blessing is in you, which shall be introduced," (1.) "In a glorious manner; for, whereas you have been often told that he should be born among you, I am now further to tell you that he shall be born of a virgin, which will signify both the divine power and the divine purity with which he shall be brought into the world,—that he shall be an extraordinary person, for he shall not be born by ordinary generation,—and that he shall be a holy thing, not stained with the common pollutions of the human nature, therefore incontestably fit to have the throne of his father David given him." Now this, though it was to be accomplished above 500 years after, was a most encouraging sign to the house of David (and to them, under that title, this prophecy is directed, v. 13) and an assurance that God would not cast them off. Ephraim did indeed envy Judah (ch. xi. 13) and sought the ruin of that kingdom, but could not prevail; for the sceptre should never depart from Judah till the coming of Shiloh, Gen. xlix. 10. Those whom God designs for the great salvation may take that for a sign to them that they shall not be swallowed up by any trouble they may meet with in the way. (2.) The Messiah shall be introduced on a glorious errand, wrapped up in his glorious name: *They shall call his name Immanuel—God with us*, God in our nature, God at

peace with us, in covenant with us. This was fulfilled in their calling him *Jesus—a Saviour* (Matt. i. 21—25), for, if he had not been *Immanuel—God with us*, he could not have been *Jesus—a Saviour*. Now this was a further sign of God's favour to the house of David and the tribe of Judah; for he that intended to work this great salvation among them no doubt would work out for them all those other salvations which were to be the types and figures of this, and as it were preludes to this. "Here is a sign for you, not in the depth nor in the height, but in the prophecy, in the promise, in the covenant made with David, which you are no strangers to. The promised seed shall be Immanuel, *God with us*, let that word comfort you (ch. viii. 10), that *God is with us*, and (v. 8) that your land is Immanuel's land. Let not the heart of the house of David be moved thus (v. 2), nor let Judah fear the setting up of the son of Tabeal (v. 6), for nothing can cut off the entail on the Son of David that shall be Immanuel." Note, The strongest consolations, in time of trouble, are those which are borrowed from Christ, our relation to him, our interest in him, and our expectations of him and from him. Of this child it is further foretold (v. 15) that though he shall not be born like other children, but of a virgin, yet he shall be really and truly man, and shall be nursed and brought up like other children: *Butter and honey shall he eat*, as other children do, particularly the children of that land which *flowed with milk and honey*. Though he be conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, yet he shall not therefore be fed with angels' food, but, as it becomes him, shall be in all things made like unto his brethren, Heb. ii. 17. Nor shall he, though born thus by extraordinary generation, be a man immediately, but, as other children, shall advance gradually through the several states of infancy, childhood, and youth, to that of manhood, and, growing in wisdom and stature, shall at length wax strong in spirit, and come to maturity, so as to know how to *refuse the evil and choose the good*. See Luke ii. 40, 52. Note, Children are fed when they are little that they may be taught and instructed when they have grown up; they have their maintenance in order to their education.

2. Here is another sign in particular of the speedy destruction of these potent princes that were now a terror to Judah, v. 16. "Before this child (so it should be read), this child which I have now in my arms" (he means not Immanuel, but Shear-jashub his own son, whom he was ordered to take with him for a sign, v. 3), "before this child shall know how to *refuse the evil and choose the good*" (and those who saw what his present stature and forwardness were would easily conjecture how long that would be), "before this child be three or

four years older, the land that thou abhorrest, these confederate forces of Israelites and Syrians, which thou hast such an enmity to and standest in such dread of, shall be forsaken of both their kings, both Pekah and Rezin," who were in so close an alliance that they seemed as if they were the kings but of one kingdom. This was fully accomplished; for, within two or three years after this, Hoshea conspired against Pekah, and slew him (2 Kings xv. 30), and, before that, the king of Assyria took Damascus, and slew Rezin, 2 Kings xvi. 9. Nay, there was a present event, which happened immediately, and which this child carried the prediction of in his name, which was a pledge and earnest of this further event. *Shear-jashub* signifies *The remnant shall return*, which doubtless points at the wonderful return of those 200,000 captives whom Pekah and Rezin had carried away, who were brought back, not by might or power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts. Read the story, 2 Chron xxviii. 8—15. The prophetic naming of this child having thus had its accomplishment, no doubt this, which was further added concerning him, should have its accomplishment likewise, that Syria and Israel should be deprived of both their kings. One mercy from God encourages us to hope for another, if it engages us to prepare for another.

17 The LORD shall bring upon thee, and upon thy people, and upon thy father's house, days that have not come, from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah; *even* the king of Assyria. 18 And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the LORD shall hiss for the fly that *is* in the uttermost part of the rivers of Egypt, and for the bee that *is* in the land of Assyria. 19 And they shall come, and shall rest all of them in the desolate valleys, and in the holes of the rocks, and upon all thorns, and upon all bushes. 20 In the same day shall the LORD shave with a razor that is hired, *namely*, by them beyond the river, by the king of Assyria, the head, and the hair of the feet: and it shall also consume the beard. 21 And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* a man shall nourish a young cow, and two sheep: 22 And it shall come to pass, for the abundance of milk *that* they shall give, he shall eat butter: for butter and honey shall every one eat that is left in the land. 23 And it shall come to pass in that



day, *that* every place shall be, where there were a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings, it shall *even* be for briars and thorns. 24 With arrows and with bows shall *men* come thither; because all the land shall become briars and thorns. 25 And *on* all hills that shall be digged with the mattock, there shall not come thither the fear of briars and thorns: but it shall be for the sending forth of oxen, and for the treading of lesser cattle.

After the comfortable promises made to Ahaz as a branch of the house of David, here follow terrible threatenings against him, as a degenerate branch of that house; for though the loving-kindness of God shall not be utterly taken away, for the sake of David and the covenant made with him, yet his iniquity shall be *chastened with the rod*, and his sin with stripes. Let those that will not mix faith with the promises of God expect to hear the alarms of his threatenings.

I. The judgment threatened is very great, v. 17. It is very great, for it is general; it shall be brought upon the prince himself (high as he is, he shall not be out of the reach of it), and upon the people, the whole body of the nation, and upon the royal family, *upon all thy father's house*; it shall be a judgment entailed on posterity, and shall go along with the royal blood. It is very great, for it shall be unprecedented—*days that have not come*; so dark, so gloomy, so melancholy, as never were the like since the revolt of the ten tribes, when Ephraim departed from Judah, which was indeed a sad time to the house of David. Note, The longer men continue in sin the sorer punishments they have reason to expect. It is the Lord that will bring these days upon them, for our times are in his hand, and who can resist or escape the judgments he brings?

II. The enemy that should be employed as the instrument of this judgment is the king of Assyria. Ahaz reposed great confidence in that prince for help against the confederate powers of Israel and Syria, and minded the less what God said to him by his prophet for his encouragement because he built much upon his interest in the king of Assyria, and had meanly promised to be his servant if he would send him some succours; he had also made him a present of gold and silver, for which he drained the treasures both of church and state, 2 Kings xvi. 7, 8. Now God threatens that that king of Assyria whom he made his stay instead of God should become a scourge to him. He was so speedily; for, when he *came to him, he distressed him, but strengthened him not* (2 Chron. xxviii. 20), the reed not only

broke under him, but ran into his hand, and pierced it, and thenceforward the kings of Assyria were, for a long time, grieving thorns to Judah, and gave them a great deal of trouble. Note, The creature that we make our hope commonly proves our hurt. The king of Assyria, not long after this, made himself master of the ten tribes, carried them captive, and laid their country waste, so as fully to answer the prediction here; and perhaps it may refer to that, as an explication of v. 8, where it is foretold that Ephraim shall be broken, that it shall not be a people; and it is easy to suppose that the prophet (at v. 17) turns his speech to the king of Israel, denouncing God's judgments against him for invading Judah. But the expositors universally understand it of Ahaz and his kingdom. Now observe, 1. Summons given to the invaders (v. 18).

*The Lord shall whistle for the fly and the bee.* See ch. v. 26. Enemies that seem as contemptible as a fly or a bee, and are as easily crushed, shall yet, when God pleases, do his work as effectually as lions and young lions. Though they are as far distant from one another as the rivers of Egypt and the land of Assyria, yet they shall punctually meet to join in this work when God commands their attendance; for, when God has work to do, he will not be at a loss for instruments to do it with. 2. Possession taken by them, v. 19. It should seem as if the country were in no condition to make resistance. They find no difficulties in forcing their way, *out come and rest all of them in the desolate valleys*, which the inhabitants had deserted upon the first alarm and left them a cheap and easy prey to the invaders. They shall come and rest in the low grounds like swarms of flies and bees, and shall render themselves impregnable by taking shelter in the holes of the rocks, as bees often do, and show themselves formidable by appearing openly upon all thorns and all bushes; so generally shall the land be overspread with them. These bees shall knit upon the thorns and bushes, and there rest undisturbed. 3. Great desolations made, and the country generally depopulated (v. 20): *The Lord shall shave the hair of the head, and beard, and feet*; he shall sweep all away, as the leper, when he was cleansed, *shaved off all his hair*, Lev. xiv. 8, 9. This is done with a razor which is hired, either which God has hired (as if he had none of his own; but what he hires, and whom he employs in any service for him, he will pay for. See Ezek. xxix. 18, 19), or which Ahaz has hired for his assistance. God will make that to be an instrument of his destruction which he hired into his service. Note, Many are beaten with that arm of flesh which they trusted to rather than to the arm of the Lord, and which they were at a great expense upon, when by faith and prayer they might have found cheap and

easy succour in God. 4. The consequences of this general depopulation. (1.) The flocks of cattle shall be all destroyed, so that a man who had herds and flocks in abundance shall be stripped of them all by the enemy, and shall with much ado save for his own use a young cow and two sheep—a poor stock (v. 21), yet he shall think himself happy in having any left. (2.) The few cattle that are left shall have such a large compass of ground to feed in that *they shall give abundance of milk*, and very good milk, such as shall produce butter enough, v. 22. There shall also be such want of men that the milk of one cow and two sheep shall serve a whole family, which used to keep abundance of servants and consume a great deal, but is now reduced. (3.) The breed of cattle shall be destroyed; so that those who used to eat flesh (as the Jews commonly did) shall be necessitated to confine themselves to butter and honey, for there shall be no flesh for them; and the country shall be so depopulated that there shall be butter and honey enough for the few that are left in it. (4.) Good land, that used to be let well, shall be all overrun with briers and thorns (v. 23); where there used to be a thousand vines planted, for which the tenants used to pay a thousand shekels, or pieces of silver, yearly rent, there shall be nothing now but briers and thorns, no profit either for landlord or tenant, all being laid waste by the army of the invaders. Note, God can soon turn a fruitful land into barrenness; and it is just with him to turn vines into briers if we, instead of bringing forth grapes to him, bring forth wild grapes, *ch. v. 4.* (5.) The implements of husbandry shall be turned into instruments of war, v. 24. The whole land having become briers and thorns, the grounds that men used to come to with sickles and pruning-hooks to gather in the fruits they shall now come to with arrows and bows, to hunt for wild beasts in the thickets, or to defend themselves from the robbers that lurk in the bushes, seeking for prey, or to kill the serpents and venomous beasts that are hid there. This denotes a very sad change of the face of that pleasant land. But what melancholy change is there which sin will not make with a people? (6.) Where briers and thorns were wont to be of use and to do good service, even in the hedges, for the defence of the enclosed grounds, they shall be plucked up, and all laid in common. There shall be briers and thorns in abundance where they should not be, but none where they should be, v. 25. *The hills that shall be digged with the mattock*, for special use, from which the cattle used to be kept off with the fear of briers and thorns, shall now be thrown open, the *hedges broken down for the boar out of the wood* to waste it, Ps. lxxx. 12, 13. It shall be left at large for oxen to run in and less cattle. See the

effect of sin and the curse; it has made the earth a forest of thorns and thistles, except as it is forced into some order by the constant care and labour of man. And see what folly it is to set our hearts upon possessions of lands, be they ever so fruitful, ever so pleasant; if they lie ever so little neglected and uncultivated, or if they be abused by a wasteful careless heir or tenant, or the country be laid waste by war, they will soon become frightful deserts. Heaven is a paradise not subject to such changes.

## CHAPTER VIII.

This chapter, and the four next that follow it (to chap. xiii.) are all one continued discourse or sermon, the scope of which is to show the great destruction that should now shortly be brought upon the kingdom of Israel, and the great disturbance that should be given to the kingdom of Judah by the king of Assyria, and that both were for their sins; but rich provision is made of comfort for those that feared God in those dark times, referring especially to the days of the Messiah. In this chapter we have, I. A prophecy of the destruction of the confederate kingdoms of Syria and Israel by the king of Assyria, v. 1—4. II. Of the desolations that should be made by that proud victorious prince in the land of Israel and Judah, v. 5—8. III. Great encouragement given to the people of God in the midst of those distractions; they are assured, 1. That the enemies shall not gain their point against them, v. 9, 10. 2. That if they kept up the fear of God, and kept down the fear of man, they should find God their refuge (v. 11—14), and while others stumbled, and fell into despair, they should be enabled to wait on God, and should see themselves reserved for better times, v. 15—18. Lastly, He gives a necessary caution to all, at their peril, not to consult with familiar spirits, for they would thereby throw themselves into despair, but to keep close to the word of God, v. 19—22. And these counsels and these comforts will still be of use to us in time of trouble.

**M**OREOVER the LORD said unto me, Take thee a great roll, and write in it with a man's pen concerning Maher-shalal-hash-baz. 2 And I took unto me faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the priest, and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah. 3 And I went unto the prophetess: and she conceived, and bare a son. Then said the LORD to me, Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz. 4 For before the child shall have knowledge to cry, My father, and my mother, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of Assyria. 5 The LORD spake also unto me again, saying, 6 Forasmuch as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son; 7 Now therefore, behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, even the king of Assyria, and all his glory: and he shall come up over all his channels, and go over all his banks: 8 And he shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck; and the



stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel.

In these verses we have a prophecy of the successes of the king of Assyria against Damascus, Samaria, and Judah, that the two former should be laid waste by him, and the last greatly frightened. Here we have,

I. Orders given to the prophet to write this prophecy, and publish it to be seen and read of all men, and to leave it upon record, that when the thing came to pass they might know that God had sent him; for that was one end of prophecy, John xiv. 29. He must *take a great roll*, which would contain those five chapters fairly written in words at length; and he must write in it all that he had foretold concerning the king of Assyria's invading the country; he must *write it with a man's pen*, in the usual way and style of writing, so as that it might be legible and intelligible by all. See Hab. ii. 2, *Write the vision, and make it plain*. Those that speak and write of the things of God should avoid obscurity, and study to speak and write so as to be understood, 1 Cor. xiv. 19. Those that write for men should write with a man's pen, and not covet the pen or tongue of angels. And forasmuch as it is usual to put some short, but significant comprehensive title before books that are published, the prophet is directed to call his book  *Maher-shalal-hash-baz—Make speed to the spoil, hasten to the prey*, intimating that the Assyrian army should come upon them with great speed and make great spoil. By this title the substance and meaning of the book would be enquired after by those that heard of it, and remembered by those that had read it or heard it read. It is sometimes a good help to memory to put much matter in few words, which serve as handles by which we take hold of more.

II. The care of the prophet to get this record well attested (v. 2): *I took unto me faithful witnesses to record*; he wrote the prophecy in their sight and presence, and made them subscribe their names to it, that they might be ready, if afterwards there should be occasion, to make oath of it, that the prophet had so long before foretold the descent which the Assyrians made upon that country. He names his witnesses for the greater certainty, that they might be appealed to by any. They were two in number (for out of the mouth of two witnesses shall every word be established); one was Uriah the priest; he is mentioned in the story of Ahaz, but for none of his good deeds, for he humoured Ahaz with an idolatrous altar (2 Kings xvi. 10, 11); however, at this time, no exception lay against him, being a faithful witness. See what full satisfaction the prophets took care to give to all persons concerned of the sincerity of their intentions, that we might know with a full assurance the certainty of

the things wherein we have been instructed, and that we have not followed cunningly-devised fables.

III. The making of the title of his book the name of his child, that it might be the more taken notice of and the more effectually perpetuated, v. 3. His wife (because the wife of a prophet) is called *the prophetess*, she *conceived and bore a son*, another son, who must carry a sermon in his name, as the former had done (ch. vii. 3), but with this difference, that spoke mercy, *Shear-jashub—The remnant shall return*: but, that being slighted, this speaks judgment,  *Maher-shalal-hash-baz—In making speed to the spoil! he shall hasten, or he has hastened, to the prey*. The prophecy is doubled, even in this one name, for the thing was certain. *I will hasten my word*, Jer. i. 12. Every time the child was called by his name, or any part of it, it would serve as a memorandum of the judgments approaching. Note, It is good for us often to put ourselves in mind of the changes and troubles we are liable to in this world, and which perhaps are at the door. When we look with pleasure on our children it should be with the alloy of this thought, We know not what they are yet reserved for.

IV. The prophecy itself, which explains this mystical name.

1. That Syria and Israel, who were now in confederacy against Judah, should in a very little time become an easy prey to the king of Assyria and his victorious army (v. 4): *“Before the child, now newly born and named, shall have knowledge to cry, My father, and, My mother”* (which are usually some of the first things that children know and some of the first words that children speak), that is, “in about a year or two, *the riches of Damascus, and the spoil of Samaria*, those cities that are now so secure themselves and so formidable to their neighbours, *shall be taken away before the king of Assyria*, who shall plunder both city and country, and send the best effects of both into his own land, to enrich that, and as trophies of his victory.” Note, Those that spoil others must expect to be themselves spoiled (ch. xxxiii. 1); for the Lord is righteous, and those that are troublesome shall be troubled.

2. That forasmuch as there were many in Judah that were secretly in the interests of Syria and Israel, and were disaffected to the house of David, God would chastise them also by the king of Assyria, who should create a great deal of vexation to Judah, as was foretold, ch. vii. 17. Observe, (1.) What was the sin of the discontented party in Judah (v. 6): *This people, whom the prophet here speaks to, refuse the waters of Shiloah that go softly*, despise their own country and the government of it, and love to run it down, because it does not make so great a figure, and so great a noise, in the world, as some other kings and kingdoms

do. They refuse the comforts which God's prophets offer them from the word of God, speaking to them in a still small voice, and make nothing of them; but *they rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son*, who were the enemies of their country, and were now actually invading it; they cried them up as brave men, magnified their policies and strength, applauded their conduct, were well pleased with their successes, and were hearty well-wishers to their designs, and resolved to desert and go over to them. Such vipers does many a state foster in its bosom, that eat its bread, and yet adhere to its enemies, and are ready to quit its interests if they but seem to totter. (2.) The judgment which God would bring upon them for this sin. The same king of Assyria that should lay Ephraim and Syria waste should be a scourge and terror to those of their party in Judah, *v. 7, 8*. Because they *refuse the waters of Shiloah*, and will not accommodate themselves to the government God has set over them, but are uneasy under it, *therefore the Lord brings upon them the waters of the river, strong and many*, the river Euphrates. They slighted the land of Judah, because it had no river to boast of comparable to that; the river at Jerusalem was a very inconsiderable one. "Well," says God, "if you be such admirers of Euphrates, you shall have enough of it; the king of Assyria, whose country lies upon that river, shall come with his glory, with his great army, which you cry up as his glory, despising your own king because he cannot bring such an army as that into the field; God shall bring that army upon you." If we value men, if we over-value them, for their worldly wealth and power, it is just with God to make them thereby a scourge to us. It is used as an argument against magnifying rich men that *rich men oppress us*, Jam. ii. 3, 6. Let us be best pleased with the waters of Shiloah, that go softly, for rapid streams are dangerous. It is threatened that the Assyrian army should break in upon them like a deluge, or inundation of waters, bearing down all before it, should come up over all his channels, and overflow all his banks. It would be to no purpose to oppose or withstand them. Sennacherib and his army should pass through Judah, and meet with so little resistance that it should look more like a march through the country than a descent upon it. *He shall reach even to the neck*, that is, he shall advance so far as to lay siege to Jerusalem, the head of the kingdom, and nothing but that shall be kept out of his hands; for that was the holy city. Note, In the greatest deluge of trouble God can and will keep the head of his people above water, and so preserve their comforts and spiritual lives; the waters that come into their souls may reach to the neck (Ps. lxxix. 1), but there shall their proud waves be stayed. And here is another comfort-

ble intimation that though the stretching out of the wings of the Assyrian, that bird of prey, though the right and left wing of his army, should fill the breadth of the land of Judah, yet still it was Immanuel's land. It is *thy land, O Immanuel!* It was to be Christ's land; for there he was to be born, and live, and preach, and work miracles. He was Zion's King, and therefore had a peculiar interest in and concern for that land. Note, The lands that Immanuel owns for his, as he does all those lands that own him, though they may be deluged, shall not be destroyed; *for, when the enemy shall come in like a flood, Immanuel shall secure his own, and shall lift up a standard against him*, ch. lix. 19.

9 Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces; and give ear, all ye of far countries: gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces. 10 Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand: for God is with us. 11 For the Lord spake thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people, saying, 12 Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. 13 Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. 14 And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 15 And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken.

The prophet here returns to speak of the present distress that Ahaz and his court and kingdom were in upon account of the threatening confederacy of the ten tribes and the Syrians against them. And in these verses,

I. He triumphs over the invading enemies, and, in effect, sets them at defiance, and bids them do their worst (*v. 9, 10*): "O ye people, ye of far countries, give ear to what the prophet says to you in God's name." 1. "We doubt not but you will now make your utmost efforts against Judah and Jerusalem. You *associate yourselves* in a strict alliance. You *gird yourselves*, and again you *gird yourselves*; you prepare for action; you address yourselves to it with resolution; you gird on your swords; you



gird up your loins. You animate and encourage yourselves and one another with all the considerations you can think of; you *take counsel together*, call councils of war, and all heads are at work about the proper methods for making yourselves masters of the land of Judah. *You speak the word*; you come to resolutions concerning it, and are not always deliberating; you determine what to do, and are very confident of the success of it, that the matter will be accomplished with a word's speaking." Note, It is with a great deal of policy, resolution, and assurance, that the church's enemies carry on their designs against it; and abundance of pains they take to roll a stone that will certainly return upon them. 2. "This is to let you know that all your efforts will be ineffectual. You cannot, you shall not, gain your point, nor carry the day: *You shall be broken in pieces*. Though you associate yourselves, though you gird yourselves, though you proceed with all the policy and precaution imaginable, yet, I tell you again and again, all your projects shall be baffled, *you shall be broken in pieces*. Nay, not only shall your attempts be ruined, but your attempts shall be your ruin; you shall be broken by those designs you have formed against Jerusalem: *Your counsels shall come to nought*; for there is no wisdom nor counsel against the Lord. Your resolves will not be put in execution; they shall not stand. You speak the word, but *who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, if the Lord commandeth it not?* What sets up itself against God, and his cause and counsel, cannot stand, but must inevitably fall. *For God is with us*" (this refers to the name of Immanuel—God with us); "the Messiah is to be born among us, and a people designed for such an honour cannot be given up to utter ruin. We have now the special presence of God with us in his temple, his oracles, his promises, and these are our defence. God is with us; he is on our side, to take our part and fight for us; and, *if God be for us, who can be against us?*" Thus does the daughter of Zion despise them.

II. He comforts and encourages the people of God with the same comforts and encouragements which he himself had received. The attempt made upon them was very formidable; the house of David, the court and royal family, were at their wits' end (*ch. vii. 2*), and then no marvel if the people were in a consternation. Now,

1. The prophet tells us how he was himself taught of God not to give way to such amazing fears as the people were disturbed with, nor to run into the same measures with them (*v. 11*): "*The Lord spoke to me with a strong hand not to walk in the way of this people, not to say as they say nor do as they do, not to entertain the same frightful apprehensions of things nor to approve of*

their projects of making peace upon any terms, or calling in the help of the Assyrians." God instructed the prophet not to go down the stream. Note, (1.) There is a proneness in the best of men to be frightened at threatening clouds, especially when fears are epidemic. We are all too apt to walk in the way of the people we live among, though it be not a good way. (2.) Those whom God loves and owns he will instruct and enable to swim against the stream of common corruptions, particularly of common fears. He will find ways to teach his own people not to walk in the way of other people, but in a sober singularity. (3.) Corruption is sometimes so active in the hearts even of good men that they have need to be taught their duty with a strong hand, and it is God's prerogative to teach so, for he only can give an understanding and overpower the contradiction of unbelief and prejudice. He can teach the heart; and herein none teaches like him. (4.) Those that are to teach others have need to be themselves well instructed in their duty, and then they teach most powerfully when they teach experimentally. The word that comes from the heart is most likely to reach to the heart; and what we are ourselves by the grace of God instructed in we should, as we are able, teach others also.

2. Now what is it that he says to God's people?

(1.) He cautions them against a sinful fear, *v. 12*. It seems it was the way of this people at this time, and fear is catching. He whose heart fails him makes his brethren's heart to fail, like his heart (*Deut. xx. 8*); therefore *Say you not, A confederacy, to all those to whom this people shall say, A confederacy*; that is, [1.] "Be not associated with them in the confederacies they are projecting and forecasting for. Do not join with those that, for the securing of themselves, are for making a league with the Assyrians, through unbelief, and distrust of God and their cause. Do not come into any such confederacy." Note, It concerns us, in time of trouble, to watch against all such fears as put us upon taking any indirect courses for our own security. [2.] "Be not afraid of the confederacies they frighten themselves and one another with. Do not distress yourselves with the apprehension of a confederacy upon every thing that stirs, nor, when any little thing is amiss, cry out presently, There is a plot, a plot. When they talk what dismal news there is, *Syria is joined with Ephraim*, what will become of us? must we fight, or must we flee, or must we yield? do not you fear their fear: *Be not afraid of the signs of heaven*, as the heathen are, *Jer. x. 2*. Be not afraid of evil tidings on earth, but let your hearts be fixed. Fear not that which they fear, nor be afraid as they are. Be not put into such a fright as causes trem-

bling and shaking;" so the word signifies. Note, When the church's enemies have sinful confederacies on foot the church's friends should watch against the sinful fears of those confederacies.

(2.) He advises them to a gracious religious fear: *But sanctify the Lord of hosts himself, v. 13.* Note, The believing fear of God is a special preservative against the disquieting fear of man; see 1 Pet. iii. 14, 15, where this is quoted, and applied to suffering Christians. [1.] We must look upon God as the Lord of hosts, that has all power in his hand and all creatures at his beck. [2.] We must sanctify him accordingly, give him the glory due to that name, and behave towards him as those that believe him to be a holy God. [3.] We must make him our fear, the object of our fear, and make him our dread, keep up a reverence of his providence and stand in awe of his sovereignty, be afraid of his displeasure and silently acquiesce in all his disposals. Were we but duly affected with the greatness and glory of God, we should see the pomp of our enemies eclipsed and clouded, and all their power restrained and under check; see Neh. iv. 14. Those that are afraid of the reproach of men forget the Lord their Maker, ch. li. 12, 13. Compare Luke xii. 4, 5.

(3.) He assures them of a holy security and serenity of mind in so doing (v. 14): *"He shall be for a sanctuary; make him your fear, and you shall find him your hope, your help, your defence, and your mighty deliverer. He will sanctify and preserve you. He will be for a sanctuary,"* [1.] To make you holy. He will be your sanctification;" so some read it. If we sanctify God by our praises, he will sanctify us by his grace. [2.] "To make you easy. He will be your sanctuary, to which you may flee for safety, and where you are privileged from all the arrests of fear; you shall find an inviolable refuge and security in him, and see yourselves out of the reach of danger. Those that truly fear God shall not need to fear any evil.

III. He threatens the ruin of the ungodly and unbelieving, both in Judah and Israel. They have no part nor lot in the foregoing comforts; that God who will be a sanctuary to those who trust in him will be a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, to those who leave these waters of Shiloah, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son, (v. 6), who make the creature their fear and their hope, v. 14, 15. The prophet foresees that the greatest part of both the houses of Israel would not sanctify the Lord of hosts, and to them he would be for a gin and a snare; he would be a terror to them, as he would be a support and stay to those that trusted in him. Instead of profiting by the word of God, they should be offended at it; and the providences of God, instead of leading them

to him, would drive them from him. What was a savour of life unto life to others would be a savour of death unto death to them. "So that many among them shall stumble and fall; they shall fall both into sin and into ruin; they shall fall by the sword, shall be taken prisoners, and go into captivity." Note, If the things of God be an offence to us, they will be an undoing to us. Some apply this to the unbelieving Jews, who rejected Christ, and to whom he became a stone of stumbling; for the apostle quotes this scripture with application to all those who persisted in their unbelief of the gospel of Christ (1 Pet. ii. 8); to them he is a rock of offence, because, being disobedient to the word, they stumble at it.

16 Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples. 17 And I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him. 18 Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth in mount Zion. 19 And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? For the living to the dead? 20 To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. 21 And they shall pass through it, hardly bestead and hungry: and it shall come to pass, that when they shall be hungry, they shall fret themselves, and curse their king and their God, and look upward. 22 And they shall look unto the earth; and behold trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish; and they shall be driven to darkness.

In these verses we have,

I. The unspeakable privilege which the people of God enjoy in having the oracles of God consigned over to them, and being entrusted with the sacred writings. That they may sanctify the Lord of hosts, may make him their fear and find him their sanctuary, bind up the testimony, v. 16. Note, It is a great instance of God's care of his church and love to it that he has lodged in it the invaluable treasure of divine revelation. 1. It is a testimony and a law; not only this prophecy is so, which must therefore be preserved safely for the comfort of God's people in the approaching times of trouble



and distress, but the whole word of God is so; God has attested it, and he has enjoined it. As a testimony it directs our faith; as a law it directs our practice; and we ought both to subscribe to the truths of it and to submit to the precepts of it. 2. This testimony and this law are bound up and sealed, for we are not to add to them nor diminish from them; they are a letter from God to man, folded up and sealed, a proclamation under the broad seal. The binding up and sealing of the Old Testament signified that the full explication of many of the prophecies of it was reserved for the New-Testament times. Dan. xii. 4, *Seal the book till the time of the end*; but what was then bound up and sealed is now open and unsealed, and *revealed unto babes*, Matt. xi. 25. Yet with reference to the other world, and the future state, still the testimony is bound up and sealed, for we know but in part, and prophesy but in part. 3. They are lodged as a sacred deposit in the hands of the disciples *of the children of the prophets and the covenant*, Acts iii. 25. This is the good thing which is committed to them, and which they are charged with the custody of, 2 Tim. i. 13, 14. Those that had prophets for their tutors must still keep close to the written word.

II. The good use which we ought to make of this privilege. This we are taught,

1. By the prophet's own practice and resolutions, v. 17, 18. He embraced the law and the testimony, and he had the comfort of them, in the midst of the many discouragements he met with. Note, Those ministers can best recommend the word of God to others that have themselves found the satisfaction of relying upon it. Observe,

(1.) The discouragements which the prophet laboured under. He specifies two:—[1.] The frowns of God, not so much upon himself, but upon his people, whose interests lay very near his heart: "*He hides his face from the house of Jacob*, and seems at present to neglect them, and lay them under the tokens of his displeasure." The prophet was himself employed in revealing God's wrath against them, and yet grieved that for it, as one that did not desire the woeful day. If the house of Jacob forsake the God of Jacob, let it not be thought strange that he hides his face from them. [2.] The contempt and reproaches of men, not only upon himself, but upon his disciples, among whom the law and the testimony were sealed: *I and the children whom the Lord has given me are for signs and wonders*; we are gazed at as monsters or outlandish people, pointed at as we go along the streets. Probably the prophetic names that were given to his children were ridiculed and bantered by the profane scoffers of the town. *I am as a wonder unto many*, Ps. lxxi. 7. God's people are the world's wonder (Zech. iii. 8) for their singularity, and because they run not

with them to the same excess of riot, 1 Pet. iv. 4. The prophet was herein a type of Christ; for this is quoted (Heb. ii. 13) to prove that believers are Christ's children: *Behold, I and the children whom God has given me*. Parents must look upon their children as God's gifts, his gracious gifts: Jacob did so, Gen. xxxiii. 5. Ministers must look upon their converts as their children, and be tender of them accordingly (1 Thess. ii. 7), and as the children whom God has given them; for, whatever good we are instrumental of to others, it is owing to the grace of God. Christ looks upon believers as his children, whom the Father gave him (John xvii. 6), and both he and they are for signs and wonders, spoken against (Luke ii. 34), every where spoken against, Acts xxviii. 22.

(2.) The encouragement he took in reference to these discouragements. [1.] He saw the hand of God in all that which was discouraging to him, and kept his eye upon that. Whatever trouble the house of Jacob is in, it comes from God's hiding his face; nay, whatever contempt was put upon him or his friends, it is from the Lord of hosts; he has hidden Shimei's curse David, Job xix. 13; xxx. 11. [2.] He saw God dwelling in Mount Zion, manifesting himself to his people, and ready to hear their prayers and receive their homage. Though, for the present, he hide his face from the house of Jacob, yet they know where to find him and recover the sight of him; he dwells in Mount Zion. [3.] He therefore resolved to wait upon the Lord and to look for him; to attend his motions even while he hid his face, and to expect with a humble assurance his returns in a way of mercy. Those that wait upon God by faith and prayer may look for him with hope and joy. When we have not sensible comforts we must still keep up our observance of God and obedience to him, and then wait awhile; *at evening time it shall be light*.

2. By the counsel and advice which he gives to his disciples, among whom the law and the testimony were sealed, to whom were committed the lively oracles.

(1.) He supposes they would be tempted, in the day of their distress, to consult *those that had familiar spirits*, that dealt with the devil, asked his advice, and desired to be informed by him concerning things to come, that they might take their measures accordingly. Thus Saul, when he was in straits, made his application to the witch of Endor (1 Sam. xxviii. 7, 15), and Ahaziah to the god of Ekron, 2 Kings i. 2. These conjurors had strange fantastic gestures and tones: *They peeped and muttered*; they muffled their heads, that they could neither see nor be seen plainly, but peeped and were peeped at. Or both the words here used may refer to their voice and manner of speaking; they delivered what they had

to say with a low, hollow, broken sound, scarcely articulate, and sometimes in a pining or mournful tone, like a crane, or a swallow, or a dove, *ch. xxxviii. 14.* They spoke not with that boldness and plainness which the prophets of the Lord spoke with, but as those who desire to amuse people rather than to instruct them; yet there were those who were so wretchedly sottish as to seek to them and to court others to do so, even the prophet's hearers, who knew better things, whom therefore the prophet warns not to say, *A confederacy* with such. There were express laws against this wickedness (*Lev. xix. 31; xx. 27.*), and yet it was found in Israel, is found even in Christian nations; but let all that have any sense of religion show it, by startling at the thought of it. *Get thee behind me, Satan.* Dread the use of spells and charms, and consulting those that by hidden arts pretend to tell fortunes, cure diseases, or discover things lost; for this is a heinous crime, and, in effect, denies the God that is above.

(2.) He furnishes them with an answer to this temptation, puts words into their mouths. "If any go about thus to ensnare you, give them this reply: *Should not a people seek to their God?* What! *for the living to the dead!*" [1.] "Tell them it is a principle of religion that a people ought to seek unto their God; now Jehovah is our God, and therefore to him we ought to seek, and to consult with him, and not with those that have familiar spirits. *All people will thus walk in the name of their God,* *Mic. iv. 5.* Those that made the hosts of heaven their gods *sought unto them,* *Jer. viii. 2.* Should not a people under guilt, and in trouble, seek to their God for pardon and peace? Should not a people in doubt, in want, and in danger, seek to their God for direction, supply, and protection? Since the Lord is our God, and we are his people, it is certainly our duty to seek him." [2.] "Tell them it is an instance of the greatest folly in the world to seek for living men to dead idols." What can be more absurd than to seek to lifeless images for life and living comforts, or to expect that our friends that are dead should do that for us, when we deify them and pray to them, which our living friends cannot do? *The dead know not any thing,* nor is there with them *any device or working,* *Eccl. ix. 5, 10.* It is folly therefore for the living to make their court to them, with any expectation of relief from them. Necromancers consulted the dead, as the witch of Endor, and so proclaimed their own folly. We must live by the living, and not by the dead. What life or light can we look for from those that have no light or life themselves?

(3.) He directs them to consult the oracles of God. If the prophets that were among them did not speak directly to every case, yet they had the written word, and to that

they must have recourse. Note, Those will never be drawn to consult wizards that know how to make a good use of their Bibles. Would we know how we may seek to our God, and come to the knowledge of his mind? *To the law and to the testimony.* There you will see what is good, and what the Lord requires of you. Make God's statutes your counsellors, and you will be counselled aright. Observe, [1.] What use we must make of the law and the testimony: we must *speak according to that word*, that is, we must make this our standard, conform to it, take advice from it, make our appeals to it, and in every thing be overruled and determined by it, consent to those wholesome healing words (*1 Tim. vi. 3.*), and speak of the things of God in the words which the Holy Ghost teaches. It is not enough to say nothing against it, but we must speak according to it. [2.] Why we must make this use of the law and the testimony: because we shall be convicted of the greatest folly imaginable if we do not. Those that concur not with the word of God do thereby evince that *there is no light*, no morning light (so the word is) *in them*; they have no right sense of things; they do not understand themselves, nor the difference between good and evil, truth and falsehood. Note, Those that reject divine revelation have not so much as human understanding; nor do those rightly admit the oracles of reason who will not admit the oracles of God. Some read it as a threatening: "If they speak not according to this word, there shall be no light to them, no good, no comfort or relief; but they shall be driven to darkness and despair;" as it follows here, *v. 21, 22.* What light had Saul when he consulted the witch? *1 Sam. xxviii. 18, 20.* Or what light can those expect that turn away from the Father of lights?

(4.) He reads the doom of those that seek to familiar spirits and regard not God's law and testimony; there shall not only be no light to them, no comfort or prosperity, but they may expect all horror and misery, *v. 21, 22.* [1.] The trouble they feared shall come upon them: They shall *pass through* the land, or pass to and fro in the land, unfixed, unsettled, and driven from place to place by the threatening power of an invading enemy; they shall be *hardly bestead* whither to go for the necessary supports of life, either because the country would be so impoverished that there would be nothing to be had, or at least themselves and their friends so impoverished that there would be nothing to be had for them; so that those who used to be fed to the full shall be hungry. Note, Those that go away from God go out of the way of all good. [2.] They shall be very uneasy to themselves, by their discontent and impatience under their trouble. A good man may be in want, but then he quiets himself, and strives to make



himself easy; but these people *when they shall be hungry shall fret themselves*, and when they have nothing to feed on their vexation shall prey upon their own spirits; for fretfulness is a sin that is its own punishment. [3.] They shall be very provoking to all about them, nay, to all above them; when they find all their measures broken, and themselves at their wits' end, they will forget all the rules of duty and decency, and will treasonably *curse their king* and blasphemously *curse their God*, and this more than in *their thought and in their bed-chamber*, Eccl. x. 20. They begin with cursing their king for managing the public affairs no better, as if the fault were his, when the best and wisest kings cannot secure success; but, when they have broken the bonds of their allegiance, no marvel if those of their religion do not hold them long: they next *curse their God*, curse him, and die; they quarrel with his providence, and reproach that, as if he had done them wrong. *The foolishness of man perverts his way*, and then *his heart frets against the Lord*, Prov. xix. 3. See what need we have to *keep our mouth as with a bridle* when our heart is hot within us; for the language of fretfulness is commonly very offensive. [4.] They shall abandon themselves to despair, and, which way soever they look, shall see no probability of relief. They shall look upward, but heaven shall frown upon them and look gloomy; and how can it be otherwise when they curse their God? They shall look to the earth, but what comfort can that yield to those with whom God is at war? There is nothing there but trouble, and darkness, and dimness of anguish, every thing threatening, and not one pleasant gleam, not one hopeful prospect; but they shall be driven to darkness by the violence of their own fears, which represent every thing about them black and frightful. This explains what he had said v. 20, that there shall be no light to them. Those that shut their eyes against the light of God's word will justly be abandoned to darkness, and left to wander endlessly, and the sparks of their own kindling will do them no kindness.

## CHAP IX.

The prophet in this chapter (according to the directions given him, ch. iii. 10, 11) saith to the righteous, It shall be well with thee, but Woe to the wicked, it shall be ill with him. Here are, I. Gracious promises to those that adhere to the law and to the testimony; while those that seek to familiar spirits shall be driven into darkness and dimness, they shall see a great light, relief in the midst of their distresses, typical of gospel grace. 1. In the doctrine of the Messiah, ver. 1-3. 2. His victories, ver. 4, 5. 3. His government and dominion as Immanuel, ver. 6, 7. II. Dreadful threatenings against the people of Israel, who had revolted from and were enemies to the house of David, that they should be brought to utter ruin, that their pride should bring them down (ver. 8-10); that their neighbours should make a prey of them (ver. 11, 12); that, for their impotence and hypocrisy, all their ornaments and supports should be cut off (ver. 13-17); and that by the wrath of God against them, and their wrath one against another, they should be brought to utter ruin, ver. 18-21. And this is typical of the final destruction of all the enemies of the Son of David and his kingdom.

**N**EVERTHELESS the dimness shall not be such as was in her

vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict *her by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations.* 2 The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. 3 Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased the joy: they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. 4 For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian. 5 For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood; but *this* shall be with burning and fuel of fire. 6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of his government and peace *there shall be* no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

The first words of this chapter plainly refer to the close of the foregoing chapter, where every thing looked black and melancholy: *Behold, trouble, and darkness, and dimness*—very bad, yet not so bad but that *to the upright there shall arise light in the darkness* (Ps. cxii. 4) and *at evening time it shall be light*, Zech. xiv. 7. *Nevertheless it shall not be such dimness* (either not such for kind or not such for degree) as sometimes there has been. Note, In the worst of times God's people have a *nevertheless* to comfort themselves with, something to allay and balance their troubles; they are persecuted, but not forsaken (2 Cor. iv. 9), sorrowful yet always rejoicing, 2 Cor. vi. 10. And it is matter of comfort to us, when things are at the darkest, that he who *forms the light and creates the darkness* (ch. xlv. 7) has appointed to both their bounds and set the one over against the other, Gen. i. 4. He can say, "Hitherto the dimness shall go,

so long it shall last, and no further, no longer."

1. Three things are here promised, and they all point ultimately at the grace of the gospel, which the saints then were to comfort themselves with the hopes of in every cloudy and dark day, as we now are to comfort ourselves in time of trouble with the hopes of Christ's second coming, though that be now, as his first coming then was, a thing at a great distance. The mercy likewise which God has in store for his church in the latter days may be a support to those that are mourning with her for her present calamities. We have here the promise,

1. Of a glorious light, which shall so qualify, and by degrees dispel, the dimness, that it shall not be as it sometimes has been: *Not such as was in her vexation*; there shall not be such dark times as were formerly, *when at first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and Naphtali* (which lay remote and most exposed to the inroads of the neighbouring enemies), *and afterwards he more grievously afflicted the land by the way of the sea and beyond Jordan* (v. 1), referring probably to those days when God began to cut Israel short and to smite them in all their coasts, 2 Kings x. 32. Note, God tries what less judgments will do with a people before he brings greater; but if a light affliction do not do its work with us, to humble and reform us, we must expect to be afflicted more grievously; for when God judges he will overcome. Well, those were dark times with the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, and there was *dimness of anguish in Galilee of the Gentiles*, both in respect of ignorance (they did not speak according to the law and the testimony, and then there was *no light in them*, ch. viii. 20) and in respect of trouble, and the desperate posture of their outward affairs; we have both together, 2 Chron. xv. 3, 5. *Israel has been without the true God and a teaching priest, and in those times there was no peace*. But the dimness threatened (ch. viii. 22) shall not prevail to such a degree; for (v. 2) *the people that walked in darkness have seen a great light*. (1.) At this time when the prophet lived, there were many prophets in Judah and Israel, whose prophecies were a great light both for direction and comfort to the people of God, who adhered to the law and the testimony. Besides the written word, they had prophecy; there were those that had shown them how long (Ps. lxxiv. 9), which was a great satisfaction to them, when in respect of their outward troubles *they sat in darkness, and dwelt in the land of the shadow of death*. (2.) This was to have its full accomplishment when our Lord Jesus began to appear as a prophet, and to preach the gospel in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, and in Galilee of the Gentiles. And the Old-Testament prophets, as they

were witnesses to him, so they were types of him. When he came and dwelt in the borders of Zebulun and Naphtali, then this prophecy is said to have been fulfilled. Matt. iv. 13—16. Note, [1.] Those that want the gospel walk in darkness, and know not what they do nor whither they go; and they dwell in the land of the shadow of death, in thick darkness, and in the utmost danger. [2.] When the gospel comes to any place, to any soul, light comes, a great light, a shining light, which will shine more and more. It should be welcome to us, as light is to those that sit in darkness, and we should readily entertain it, both because it is of such sovereign use to us and because it brings its own evidence with it. Truly this light is sweet.

2. Of a glorious increase, and a universal joy arising from it, (v. 3) "*Thou, O God! hast multiplied the nation*, the Jewish nation which thou hast mercy in store for; though it has been diminished by one sore judgment after another, yet now thou hast begun to multiply it again." The numbers of a nation are its strength and wealth if the numerous be industrious; and it is God that increases nations, Job xii. 23. Yet it follows, "*Thou hast not increased the joy*—the carnal joy and mirth, and those things that are commonly the matter and occasion thereof. But, notwithstanding that, *they joy before thee*; there is a great deal of serious spiritual joy among them, joy in the presence of God, with an eye to him." This is very applicable to the times of gospel light, spoken of v. 2. Then God multiplied the nation, the gospel Israel. "And to him" (so the Masorites read it) "thou hast magnified the joy, to every one that receives the light." The following words favour this reading: "*They joy before thee*; they come before thee in holy ordinances with great joy; their mirth is not like that of Israel under their vines and fig-trees (thou hast not increased that joy), but it is in the favour of God and in the tokens of his grace." Note, The gospel, when it comes in its light and power, brings joy along with it, and those who receive it aright do therein rejoice, yea, and will rejoice; therefore the conversion of the nations is prophesied of by this (Ps. lxxvii. 4), *Let the nations be glad, and sing for joy*. See Ps. xcvi. 11. (1.) It is holy joy: *They joy before thee*; they rejoice in spirit (as Christ did, Luke x. 21), and that is before God. In the eye of the world they are always as sorrowful, and yet, in God's sight, *always rejoicing*, 2 Cor. vi. 10. (2.) It is great joy; it is *according to the joy in harvest*, when those who sowed in tears, and have with long patience waited for the precious fruits of the earth, reap in joy; and as in war men rejoice when, after a hazardous battle, *they divide the spoil*. The gospel brings with it plenty and victory; but those that would have the joy of it



must expect to go through a hard work, as the husbandman before he has the joy of harvest, and a hard conflict, as the soldier before he has the joy of dividing the spoil; but the joy, when it comes, will be an abundant recompense for the toil. See Acts viii. 8, 39.

3. Of a glorious liberty and enlargement (v. 4, 5): "They shall rejoice before thee, and with good reason, *for thou hast broken the yoke of his burden*, and made him easy, for he shall no longer be in servitude; and thou hast broken the *staff of his shoulder* and the *rod of his oppressor*, that rod of the wicked which rested long on the lot of the righteous," as the Midianites' yoke was broken from off the neck of Israel by the agency of Gideon. If God makes former deliverances his patterns in working for us, we ought to make them our encouragements to hope in him and to seek to him, Ps. lxxxiii.

9. *Do unto them as to the Midianites.* What temporal deliverance this refers to is not clear, probably the preventing of Sennacherib from making himself master of Jerusalem, which was done, *as in the day of Midian*, by the immediate hand of God; and, whereas other battles were usually won with a great deal of noise and by the expense of much blood, this shall be done silently and without noise. *Under his glory God shall kindle a burning* (ch. x. 16); *a fire not blown shall consume him*, Job xx. 26. But doubtless it looks further, to the blessed fruits and effects of that great light which should visit those that sat in darkness; it would bring liberty along with it, *deliverance to the captives*, Luke iv. 18. (1.) The design of the gospel, and the grace of it, is to break the yoke of sin and Satan, to remove the burden of guilt and corruption, and to free us from the rod of those oppressors, that we might be brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Christ broke the yoke of the ceremonial law (Acts. xv. 10; Gal. v. 1), and delivered us *out of the hand of our enemies*, that we might *serve him without fear*, Luke i. 74, 75. (2.) This is done by the Spirit working like fire (Matt. iii. 11), not as the battle of the warrior is fought, with confused noise; no, the weapons of our warfare are not carnal; but it is done with the Spirit of judgment and the Spirit of burning, ch. iv. 4. It is done *as in the day of Midian*, by a work of God upon the hearts of men. Christ is our Gideon; it is his sword that doeth wonders.

II. But who, where, is he that shall undertake and accomplish these great things for the church? The prophet tells us (v. 6, 7) they shall be done by the Messiah, *Immanuel*, that son of a virgin whose birth he had foretold (ch. vii. 14), and now speaks of, in the prophetic style, as a thing already done: *the child is born*, not only because it was as certain, and he was as certain of it as if it had been done already, but because the church before his incarnation reaped great

benefit and advantage by his undertaking in virtue of that first promise concerning *the seed of the woman*, Gen. iii. 15. As he was the Lamb slain, so he was the child born, *from the foundation of the world*, Rev. xiii. 8. All the great things that God did for the Old-Testament church were done by him as the eternal Word, and for his sake as the Mediator. He was the Anointed, to whom God had respect (Ps. lxxxiv. 9), and it was for the Lord's sake, for the Lord Christ's sake, that God caused his face to shine upon his sanctuary, Dan. ix. 17. The Jewish nation, and particularly the house of David, were preserved many a time from imminent ruin only because that blessing was in them. What greater security therefore could be given to the church of God then that it should be preserved, and be the special care of the divine Providence, than this, that God had so great a mercy in reserve for it? The Chaldee paraphrast understands it of the man that shall endure for ever, even Christ. And it is an illustrious prophecy of him and of his kingdom, which doubtless those that waited for the consolation of Israel built much upon, often turned to, and read with pleasure.

1. See him in his humiliation. The same that is *the mighty God* is a *child born*; the ancient of days becomes an infant of a span long; the *everlasting Father* is a *Son given*. Such was his condescension in taking our nature upon him; thus did he humble and empty himself, to exalt and fill us. He is born into our world. *The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us*. He is given, freely given, to be all that to us which our case, in our fallen state, calls for. God so loved the world that he gave him. He is born to us, he is given to us, us men, and not to the angels that sinned. It is spoken with an air of triumph, and the angel seems to refer to these words in the notice he gives to the shepherds of the Messiah's having come (Luke ii. 11), *Unto you is born, this day, a Saviour*. Note, Christ's being born and given to us is the great foundation of our hopes, and fountain of our joys, in times of greatest grief and fear.

2. See him in his exaltation. This child, this son, this Son of God, this Son of man, that is given to us, is in a capacity to do us a great deal of kindness; for he is invested with the highest honour and power, so that we cannot but be happy if he be our friend.

(1.) See the dignity he is advanced to, and the name he has above every name. He shall be called (and therefore we are sure he is and shall be) *Wonderful, Counsellor, &c*. His people shall know him and worship him by these names; and, as one that fully answers them, they shall submit to him and depend upon him. [1.] He is *wonderful, counsellor*. Justly is he called *wonderful*, for he is both God and man. His love is the wonder of angels and glorified saints; in his

birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, he was wonderful. A constant series of wonders attended him, and, without controversy, great was the mystery of godliness concerning him. He is the *counsellor*, for he was intimately acquainted with the counsels of God from eternity, and he gives counsel to the children of men, in which he consults our welfare. It is by him that God has *given us counsel*, Ps. xvi. 7; Rev. iii. 18. He is the wisdom of the Father, and is made of God to us wisdom. Some join these together: He is the wonderful counsellor, a wonder or miracle of a counsellor; in this, as in other things, he has the pre-eminence; none teaches like him. [2.] He is the *mighty God—God, the mighty One*. As he has wisdom, so he has strength, to go through with his undertaking: he is able to save to the utmost; and such is the work of the Mediator that no less a power than that of the mighty God could accomplish it. [3.] He is the *everlasting Father, or the Father of eternity*; he is God, one with the Father, who is from everlasting to everlasting. His fatherly care of his people and tenderness towards them are everlasting. He is the author of everlasting life and happiness to them, and so is the Father of a blessed eternity to them. He is the *Father of the world to come* (so the LXX. read it), the father of the gospel-state, which is put in subjection to him, not to the angels, Heb. ii. 5. He was, from eternity, Father of the great work of redemption: his heart was upon it; it was the product of his wisdom as the *counsellor*, of his love as the *everlasting Father*. [4.] He is the *prince of peace*. As a King, he preserves the peace, commands peace, nay, he creates peace, in his kingdom. He is our peace, and it is his peace that both keeps the hearts of his people and rules in them. He is not only a peaceable prince, and his reign peaceable, but he is the author and giver of all good, all that peace which is the present and future bliss of his subjects.

(2.) See the dominion he is advanced to, and the throne he has above every throne (v. 6): *The government shall be upon his shoulder—his only*. He shall not only wear the badge of it upon his shoulder (the *key of the house of David*, ch. xxii. 22), but he shall bear the burden of it. The Father shall devolve it upon him, so that he shall have an incontestable right to govern; and he shall undertake it, so that no doubt can be made of his governing well, for he shall set his shoulder to it, and will never complain, as Moses did, of his being overcharged. *I am not able to bear all this people*, Num. xi. 11, 14. Glorious things are here spoken of Christ's government, v. 7. [1.] That it shall be an increasing government. It shall be multiplied; the bounds of his kingdom shall be more and more enlarged, and many shall be added to it daily. The lustre of it shall in-

crease, and it shall shine more and more brightly in the world. The monarchies of the earth were each less illustrious than the other, so that what began in gold ended in iron and clay, and every monarchy dwindled by degrees; but the kingdom of Christ is a growing kingdom, and will come to perfection at last. [2.] That it shall be a peaceable government, agreeable to his character as the prince of peace. He shall rule by love, shall rule in men's hearts; so that wherever his government is there shall be peace, and as his government increases the peace shall increase. The more we are subject to Christ the more easy and safe we are. [3.] That it shall be a rightful government. He that is the Son of David shall reign upon the throne of David and over his kingdom, which he is entitled to. *God shall give him the throne of his father David*, Luke i. 32, 33. The gospel church, in which Jew and Gentile are incorporated, is the holy hill of Zion, on which Christ reigns, Ps. ii. 6. [4.] That it shall be administered with prudence and equity, and so as to answer the great end of government, which is the establishment of the kingdom: *He shall order it, and settle it, with justice and judgment*. Every thing is, and shall be, well managed, in the kingdom of Christ, and none of his subjects shall ever have cause to complain. [5.] That it shall be an everlasting kingdom: *There shall be no end of the increase of his government* (it shall be still growing), no end of the increase of the peace of it, for the happiness of the subjects of this kingdom shall last to eternity and perhaps shall be progressive in infinitum—*forever*. He shall reign *henceforth even for ever*; not only throughout all generations of time, but, even when the kingdom shall be delivered up to God even the Father, the glory both of the Redeemer and the redeemed shall continue eternally. [6.] That God himself has undertaken to bring all this about: "*The Lord of hosts, who has all power in his hand and all creatures at his beck, shall perform this, shall preserve the throne of David till this prince of peace is settled in it; his zeal shall do it, his jealousy for his own honour, and the truth of his promise, and the good of his church.*" Note, The heart of God is much upon the advancement of the kingdom of Christ among men, which is very comfortable to all those that wish well to it; *the zeal of the Lord of hosts* will overcome all opposition.

8 The LORD sent a word into Jacob, and it hath lighted upon Israel. 9 And all the people shall know, *even* Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria, that say in the pride and stoutness of heart, 10 The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones: the sycomores are cut down, but we will change *them into cedars*.



11 Therefore the LORD shall set up the adversaries of Rezin against him, and join his enemies together; 12 The Syrians before, and the Philistines behind; and they shall devour Israel with open mouth. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand *is* stretched out still. 13 For the people turneth not unto him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the LORD of hosts. 14 Therefore the LORD will cut off from Israel head and tail, branch and rush, in one day. 15 The ancient and honourable, he *is* the head; and the prophet that teacheth lies, he *is* the tail. 16 For the leaders of this people cause *them* to err; and *they that are* led of them *are* destroyed. 17 Therefore the LORD shall have no joy in their young men, neither shall have mercy on their fatherless and widows: for every one *is* an hypocrite and an evil doer, and every mouth speaketh folly. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand *is* stretched out still. 18 For wickedness burneth as the fire: it shall devour the briers and thorns, and shall kindle in the thickets of the forest, and they shall mount up *like* the lifting up of smoke. 19 Through the wrath of the LORD of hosts is the land darkened, and the people shall be as the fuel of the fire: no man shall spare his brother. 20 And he shall snatch on the right hand, and be hungry; and he shall eat on the left hand, and they shall not be satisfied: they shall eat every man the flesh of his own arm: 21 Manasseh, Ephraim; and Ephraim, Manasseh: *and they together shall be* against Judah. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand *is* stretched out still.

Here are terrible threatenings, which are directed primarily against Israel, the kingdom of the ten tribes, Ephraim and Samaria, the ruin of which is here foretold, with all the woeful confusions that were the prefaces to that ruin, all which came to pass within a few years after; but they look further, to all the enemies of the throne and kingdom of Christ the Son of David, and read the doom of all the nations that forget God, and will not have Christ to reign over them. Observe,

I. The preface to this prediction (v. 8):

*The Lord sent a word into Jacob, sent it by his servants the prophets. He warns before he wounds. He sent notice what he would do, that they might meet him in the way of his judgments; but they would not take the hint, took no care to turn away his wrath, and so it lighted upon Israel; for no word of God shall fall to the ground. It fell upon them as a storm of rain and hail from on high, which they could not avoid: It has lighted upon them, that is, it is as sure to come as if come already, and all the people shall know by feeling it what they would not know by hearing of it. Those that are willingly ignorant of the wrath of God revealed from heaven against sin and sinners shall be made to know it.*

II. The sins charged upon the people of Israel, which provoked God to bring these judgments upon them. 1. Their insolent defiance of the justice of God, thinking themselves a match for him: "*They say, in the pride and stoutness of their heart, Let God himself do his worst; we will hold our own, and make our part good with him. If he ruin our houses, we will repair them, and make them stronger and finer than they were before. Our landlord shall not turn us out of doors, though we pay him no rent, but we will keep in possession. If the houses that were built of bricks be demolished in the war, we will rebuild them with hewn stones, that shall not so easily be thrown down. If the enemy cut down the sycamores, we will plant cedars in the room of them. We will make a hand of God's judgments, gain by them, and so outbrave them.*" Note, Those are ripening apace for ruin whose hearts are unhumbled under humbling providences: for God will walk contrary to those who thus walk contrary to him and provoke him to jealousy, as if they were stronger than he. 2. Their incorrigibleness under all the rebukes of Providence hitherto (v. 13): *The people turn not unto him that smiteth them* (they are not wrought upon to reform their lives, to forsake their sins, and to return to their duty), *neither do they seek the Lord of hosts*; either they are atheists, and have no religion, or idolaters, and seek to those gods that are the creatures of their own fancy and the works of their own hands. Note, That which God designs, in smiting us, is to turn us to himself and to set us a seeking him; and, if this point be not gained by less judgments, greater may be expected. God smites that he may not kill. 3. Their general corruption of manners and abounding profaneness. (1.) Those that should have reformed them helped to debauch them (v. 16): *The leaders of this people mislead them, and cause them to err*, by conniving at their wickedness and countenancing wicked people, and by setting them bad examples; and then no wonder if those that are led of them be deceived and so destroyed. But it is ill with a people when their physi-

cians are their worst disease. "*Those that bless this people, or call them blessed* (so the margin reads it), that flatter them, and soothe them in their wickedness, and cry *Peace, peace, to them*, cause them to err; and those that are called blessed of them are swallowed up ere they are aware. We have reason to be afraid of those that speak well of us when we do ill; see Prov. xxiv. 24; xxix. 5. (2.) Wickedness was universal, and all were infected with it (v. 17): *Every one is a hypocrite and an evil doer*. If there be any that are good, they do not, they dare not appear, for every mouth speaks folly and villany; every one is profane towards God (so the word properly signifies) and an evil doer towards man. These two commonly go together: those that fear not God regard not man; and then every mouth speaks folly, falsehood, and reproach, both against God and man; for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

III. The judgments threatened against them for this wickedness of theirs; let them not think to go unpunished.

1. In general, hereby they exposed themselves to the wrath of God, which should both devour as fire and darken as smoke. (1.) It should devour as fire (v. 18): *Wickedness shall burn as the fire*; the displeasure of God, incurred by sin, shall consume the sinners, who have made themselves as briers and thorns before it, and as the thickets of the forest, combustible matter, which the wrath of the Lord of hosts, the mighty God, will go through and burn together. (2.) It should darken as smoke. The briers and thorns, when the fire consumes them, shall mount up like the lifting up of smoke, so that the whole land shall be darkened by it; they shall be in trouble, and see no way out (v. 19) *The people shall be as the fuel of the fire*. God's wrath fastens upon none but those that make themselves fuel for it, and then they mount up as the smoke of sacrifices, being made victims to divine justice.

2. God would arm the neighbouring powers against them, v. 11, 12. At this time the kingdom of Israel was in league with that of Syria against Judah; but the Assyrians, who were adversaries to the Syrians, when they had conquered them should invade Israel, and God would stir them up to do it, and join the enemies of Israel together in alliance against them, who yet had particular ends of their own to serve and were not aware of God's hand in their alliance. Note, When enemies are set up, and joined in confederacy against a people, God's hand must be acknowledged in it. Note further, Those that partake with each other in sin, as Syria and Israel in invading Judah, must expect to share in the punishment of sin. Nay, the Syrians themselves, whom they were now in league with, should be a scourge to them (for it is no unusual thing

for those to fall out that have been united in sin), they before and the Philistines behind, one attacking them in the front and the other flanking them or falling upon their rear; so that they should be surrounded with enemies on all sides, who should devour them with open mouth, v. 12. The Philistines were not now looked upon as formidable enemies, and the Syrians were looked upon as firm friends; and yet these shall devour Israel. When men's ways displease the Lord he makes even their friends to be at war with them.

3. God would take from the midst of them those they confided in and promised themselves help from, v. 14, 15. Because the people seek not God, those they seek to and depend upon shall stand them in no stead. *The Lord will cut off head and tail, branch and rush*, which is explained in the next verse. (1.) Their magistrates, who were honourable by birth and office and were the ancients of the people, these were the head, these were the branch which they promised themselves spirit and fruit from; but because these caused them to err they should be cut off, and their dignity and power should be no protection to them when the abuse of that dignity and power was the great provocation: and it was a judgment upon the people to have their princes cut off, though they were not such as they should have been. (2.) Their prophets, their false prophets, were the tail and the rush, the most despicable of all. A wicked minister is the worst of men. *Corruptio optimi est pessima—The best things become when corrupted the worst*. The blind led the blind, and so both fell into the ditch; and the blind leaders fell first and fell undermost.

4. That the desolation should be as general as the corruption had been, and none should escape it, v. 17. (1.) Not those that were the objects of complacency. None shall be spared for love: *The Lord shall have no joy in their young men*, that were in the flower of their youth; nor will he say, *Deal gently with the young men for my sake*; no, "Let them fall with the rest, and with them let the seed of the next generation perish." (2.) Not those that were the objects of compassion. None shall be spared for pity: *He shall not have mercy on their fatherless and widows*, though he is, in a particular manner, the patron and protector of such. They had corrupted their way like all the rest; and, if the poverty and helplessness of their state was not an argument with them to keep them from sin, they could not expect it should be an argument with God to protect them from judgments.

5. That they should pull one another to pieces, that every one should help forward the common ruin, and they should be cannibals to themselves and one to another: *No man shall spare his brother*, if he come



in the way of his ambition or covetousness, or if he have any colour to be revenged on him; and how can they expect God should spare them when they show no compassion one to another? Men's passion and cruelty one against another provoke God to be angry with them all and are an evidence that he is so. Civil wars soon bring a kingdom to desolation. Such there were in Israel, when, *for the transgression of the land, many were the princes thereof*, Prov. xxviii. 2.

(1.) In these intestine broils, men *snatched on the right hand, and yet were hungry still*, and did eat the *flesh of their own arms*, preyed upon themselves for hunger or upon their nearest relations that were as their own flesh, v. 20. This bespeaks, [1.] Great famine and scarcity; when men had pulled all they could to them it was so little that they were still hungry, at least God did not bless it to them, so that *they eat and have not enough*, Hag. i. 6. [2.] Great rapine and plunder. *Jusque datum sceleris—iniquity is established by law*. The hedge of property, which is a hedge of protection to men's estates, shall be plucked up, and every man shall think all that his own which he can lay his hands on (*vivitur ex rapto, non hospes ab hospite tutus—they live on the spoil, and the rites of hospitality are all violated*); and yet, when men thus catch at that which is none of their own, they are not satisfied. Covetous desires are insatiable, and this curse is entailed on that which is ill got, that it will never do well.

(2.) These intestine broils should be not only among particular persons and private families, but among the tribes (v. 21): *Manasseh shall devour Ephraim, and Ephraim Manasseh*, though they be combined against Judah. Those that could unite against Judah could not unite with one another; but that sinful confederacy of theirs against their neighbour *that dwelt securely by them* was justly punished by this separation of them one from another. Or Judah, having sinned like Manasseh and Ephraim, shall not only suffer with them, but suffer by them. Note, Mutual enmity and animosity among the tribes of God's Israel is a sin that ripens them for ruin, and a sad symptom of ruin hastening on apace. If Ephraim be against Manasseh, and Manasseh against Ephraim, and both against Judah, they will all soon become a very easy prey to the common enemy.

6. That, though they should be followed with all these judgments, yet God would not let fall his controversy with them. It is the heavy burden of this song (v. 12, 17, 21): *For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still*, that is, (1.) They do nothing to turn away his anger; they do not repent and reform, do not humble themselves and pray, none stand in the way, none answer God's calls nor comply

with the designs of his providences, but they are hardened and secure. (2.) His anger therefore continues to burn against them and *his hand is stretched out still*. The reason why the judgments of God are prolonged is because the point is not gained, sinners are not brought to repentance by them. *The people turn not to him that smites them*, and therefore he continues to smite them; for when God judges he will overcome, and the proudest stoutest sinner shall either bend or break.

## CHAP. X.

The prophet, in this chapter, is dealing, I. With the proud oppressors of his people at home, that abused their power, to pervert justice, whom he would reckon with for their tyranny, ver. 1.—4. II. With a threatening invader of his people from abroad, Sennacherib king of Assyria, concerning whom observe, I. The commission given him to invade Judah, ver. 5, 6. 2. His pride and insolence in the execution of that commission, ver. 7—11, 13, 14. 3. A rebuke given to his haughtiness, and a threatening of his fall and ruin, when he had served the purposes for which God raised him up, ver. 12, 15—19. 4. A promise of grace to the people of God, to enable them to bear up under the affliction, and to get good by it, ver. 20—23. 5. Great encouragement given to them not to fear this threatening storm, but to hope that, though for the present all the country was put into a great consternation by it, yet it would end well, in the destruction of this formidable enemy, ver. 24—34. And this is intended to quiet the minds of good people in reference to all the threatening efforts of the wrath of the church's enemies. If God be for us, who can be against us? None to do us any harm.

**W**OE unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness *which* they have prescribed; 2 To turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and *that* they may rob the fatherless! 3 And what will ye do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation *which* shall come from far? To whom will ye flee for help? And where will ye leave your glory? 4 Without me they shall bow down under the prisoners, and they shall fall under the slain. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand *is* stretched out still.

Whether they were the princes and judges of Israel or Judah, or both, that the prophet denounced this woe against, is not certain: if those of Israel, these verses are to be joined with the close of the foregoing chapter, which is probable enough, because the burden of that prophecy (*for all this his anger is not turned away*) is repeated here (v. 4); if those of Judah, they then show what was the particular design with which God brought the Assyrian army upon them—to punish their magistrates for mal-administration, which they could not legally be called to account for. To them he speaks woes before he speaks comfort to God's own people. Here is,

I. The indictment drawn up against these oppressors, v. 1, 2. They are charged, 1

With making wicked laws and edicts: They decree *unrighteous decrees*, contrary to natural equity and the law of God: and what mischief they *prescribe* those under them *write* it, enrol it, and put it into the formality of a law. "Woe to the superior powers that devise and decree these decrees! they are not too high to be under the divine check. And woe to the inferior officers that draw them up, and enter them upon record—the writers that write the grievousness, they are not too mean to be within the divine cognizance. Principal and accessaries shall fall under the same woe." Note, It is bad to do hurt, but it is worse to do it with design and deliberation, to do wrong to many, and to involve many in the guilt of doing wrong. 2. With perverting justice in the execution of the laws that were made. No people had statutes and judgments so righteous as they had, and yet corrupt judges found ways to *turn aside the needy from judgment*, to hinder them from coming at their right and recovering what was their due, because they were needy and poor, and such as they could get nothing by nor expect any bribes from. 3. With enriching themselves by oppressing those that lay at their mercy, whom they ought to have protected. They make widows' houses and estates their prey, and they *rob the fatherless* of the little that is left them, because they have no friend to appear for them. Not to relieve them if they had wanted, not to right them if they were wronged, would have been crime enough in men that had wealth and power; but to rob them because on the side of the oppressors there was power, and the oppressed had no comforter (Eccl. iv. 1), was such a piece of barbarity as one would think none could ever be guilty of that had either the nature of a man or the name of an Israelite.

II. A challenge given them with all their pride and power to outface the judgments of God (v. 3): "*What will you do? To whom will you flee?*" You can trample upon the widows and fatherless; but *what will you do when God riseth up?*" Job xxxi. 14. Great men, who tyrannise over the poor, think they shall never be called to account for their tyranny, shall never hear of it again, or fare the worse for it; but *shall not God visit for these things?* Jer. v. 29. Will there not come a desolation upon those that have made others desolate? Perhaps it may come from far, and therefore may be long in coming; but it will come at last (reprieves are not pardons), and coming from far, from a quarter whence it was least expected, it will be the greater surprise and the more terrible. What will then become of these unrighteous judges? Now they see *their help in the gate* (Job xxxi. 21); but to whom will they then flee for help? Note, 1. There is a day of visitation coming, a day of enquiry and discovery, a searching day, which

will bring to light, to a true light, every man, and every man's work. 2. The day of visitation will be a day of desolation to all wicked people, when all their comforts and hopes will be lost and gone, and buried in ruin, and themselves left desolate. 3. Impenitent sinners will be utterly at a loss, and will not know what to do in the day of visitation and desolation. They cannot fly and hide themselves, cannot fight it out and defend themselves; they have no refuge in which either to shelter themselves from the present evil (*to whom will you flee for help?*) or to secure to themselves better times hereafter: "*Where will you leave your glory, to find it again when the storm is over?*" The wealth they had got was their glory, and they had no place of safety in which to deposit that, but they should certainly see it flee away. If our souls be our glory, as they ought to be, and we make them our chief care, we know where to leave them, and into whose hands to commit them, even those of a faithful Creator. 4. It concerns us all seriously to consider what we shall do in the day of visitation, in a day of affliction, in the day of death and judgment, and to provide that we may do well.

III. Sentence passed upon them, by which they are doomed, some to imprisonment and captivity (*they shall bow down among the prisoners, or under them*—those that were most highly elevated in sin shall be most heavily loaded and most deeply sunk in trouble), others to death: they shall fall first, and so shall fall under the rest of the slain. Those that had trampled upon the widows and fatherless shall themselves be trodden down, v. 4. "This it will come to," says God, "*without me*, that is, because you have deserted me and driven me away from you." Nothing but utter ruin can be expected by those that live without God in the world, that cast him behind their back, and so cast themselves out of his protection.

And yet, for all this, his anger is not turned away, which intimates not only that God will proceed in his controversy with them, but that they shall be in a continual dread of it; they shall, to their unspeakable terror, see his hand still stretched out against them, and there shall remain nothing but a fearful looking for of judgment.

5 O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. 6 I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. 7 Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but *it is in*



his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few. 8 For he saith, *Are not my princes altogether kings?* 9 *Is not Calno as Carchemish?* *Is not Hamath as Arpad?* *Is not Samaria as Damascus?* 10 As my hand hath found the kingdoms of the idols, and whose graven images did excel them of Jerusalem and of Samaria; 11 Shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols? 12 Wherefore it shall come to pass, *that* when the LORD hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. 13 For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done *it*, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent: and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant *man*. 14 And my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people: and as one gathereth eggs *that are left*, have I gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped. 15 Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? *Or* shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? As if the rod should shake *itself* against them that lift it up, *or* as if the staff should lift up *itself*, *as if it were* no wood. 16 Therefore shall the LORD, the LORD of hosts, send among his fat ones leanness; and under his glory he shall kindle a burning like the burning of a fire. 17 And the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame: and it shall burn and devour his thorns and his briers in one day; 18 And shall consume the glory of his forest, and of his fruitful field, both soul and body: and they shall be as when a standard-bearer fainteth. 19 And the rest of the trees of his forest shall be few, that a child may write them.

The destruction of the kingdom of Israel by Shalmaneser king of Assyria was fore-  
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told in the foregoing chapter, and it had its accomplishment in the sixth year of Hezekiah, 2 Kings xviii. 10. It was total and final, head and tail were all cut off. Now the correction of the kingdom of Judah by Sennacherib king of Assyria is foretold in this chapter; and this prediction was fulfilled in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah, when that potent prince, encouraged by the successes of his predecessor against the ten tribes, *came up against all the fenced cities of Judah and took them, and laid siege to Jerusalem* (2 Kings xviii. 13, 17), in consequence of which we may well suppose Hezekiah and his kingdom were greatly alarmed, though there was a good work of reformation lately begun among them: but it ended well, in the confusion of the Assyrians and the great encouragement of Hezekiah and his people in their return to God. Now let us see here,

I. How God, in his sovereignty, deputed the king of Assyria to be his servant, and made use of him as a mere tool to serve his own purposes with (v. 5, 6): "*O Assyrian! know this, that thou art the rod of my anger; and I will send thee to be a scourge to the people of my wrath.*" Observe here, 1. How bad the character of the Jews was, though they appeared very good. They were a *hypocritical nation*, that made a profession of religion, and at this time particularly of reformation, but were not truly religious, not truly reformed, not so good as they pretended to be now that Hezekiah had brought goodness into fashion. When rulers are pious, and so religion is in reputation, it is common for nations to be hypocritical. They are a *profane nation*; so some read it. Hezekiah had in a great measure cured them of their idolatry, and now they ran into profaneness; nay, hypocrisy is *profaneness*: none profane the name of God so much as those who are called by that name and call upon it, and yet live in sin. Being a profane hypocritical nation, they are the people of God's wrath; they lie under his wrath, and are likely to be consumed by it. Note, Hypocritical nations are the people of God's wrath: nothing is more offensive to God than dissimulation in religion. See what a change sin made: those that had been God's chosen and hallowed people, above all people, had now become the *people of his wrath*. See Amos iii. 2. 2. How mean the character of the Assyrian was, though he appeared very great. He was but *the rod of God's anger*, an instrument God was pleased to make use of for the chastening of his people, that, being thus *chastened of the Lord*, *they might not be condemned with the world*. Note, The tyrants of the world are but the tools of Providence. Men are God's hand, his sword sometimes, to kill and slay (Ps. xvii. 13, 14), at other times his rod to correct. *The staff in their hand*, wherewith they smite his people, *is his indignation*; it

is his wrath that puts the staff into their hand and enables them to deal blows at pleasure among such as thought themselves a match for them. Sometimes God makes an idolatrous nation, that serves him not at all, a scourge to a hypocritical nation, that serves him not in sincerity and truth. The Assyrian is called the *rod of God's anger* because he is employed by him. (1.) From him his power is derived: *I will send him; I will give him a charge.* Note, All the power that wicked men have, though they often use it against God, they always receive from him. Pilate could have no power against Christ unless it were *given him from above*, John xix. 11. (2.) By him the exercise of that power is directed. The Assyrian is *to take the spoil and to take the prey*, not to shed any blood. We read not of any slain, but he is to plunder the country, rifle the houses, drive away the cattle, strip the people of all their wealth and ornaments, and *tread them down like the mire of the streets*. When God's professing people wallow in the mire of sin it is just with God to suffer their enemies to tread upon them like mire. But why must the Assyrian prevail thus against them? Not that they might be ruined, but that they might be thoroughly reformed.

II. See how the king of Assyria, in his pride, magnified himself as his own master, and pretended to be absolute and above all control, to act purely according to his own will and for his own honour. *God ordained him for judgment*, even the mighty God *established him for correction* (Hab. i. 12), to be an instrument of bringing his people to repentance, *howbeit he means not so, nor does his heart think so*, v. 7.

1. He does not think that he is either God's servant or Israel's friend, either that he *can* do no more than God will let him or that he *shall* do no more than God will make to work for the good of his people. God designs to correct his people for, and so to cure them of, their hypocrisy, and bring them nearer to himself; but was that Sennacherib's design? No, it was the furthest thing from his thoughts—*he means not so*. Note, (1.) The wise God often makes even the sinful passions and projects of men subservient to his own great and holy purposes. (2.) When God makes use of men as instruments in his hand to do his work it is very common for *him* to mean one thing and *them* to mean another, nay, for them to mean quite the contrary to what he intends. What Joseph's brethren designed for hurt God overruled for good, Gen. i. 20. See Mic. iv. 11, 12. Men have their ends and God has his, but we are sure the *counsel of the Lord shall stand*. But what is it the proud Assyrian aims at? The heart of kings is unsearchable, but God knew what was in his heart.

2. He designs nothing but *to destroy and to cut off nations not a few*, and to make

himself master of them. [1.] He designs to gratify his own cruelty; nothing will serve but to destroy and cut off. He hopes to regale himself with blood and slaughter; that of particular persons will not suffice, he must cut off nations. It is below him to deal by retail; he traffics in murders by wholesale. Nations, and those not a few, must have but one neck, which he will have the pleasure of cutting off. [2.] He designs to gratify his own covetousness and ambition, to set up for a universal monarch, *and to gather unto him all nations*, Hab. ii. 5. An insatiable desire of wealth and dominion is that which carries him on in this undertaking.

3. The prophet here brings him in vaunting and hectoring; and by his general's letter to Hezekiah, written in his name, vainglory and arrogance seem to have entered very far into the spirit and genius of the man. His haughtiness and presumption are here described very largely, and his very language copied out, partly to represent him as ridiculous and partly to assure the people or God that he would be brought down; for that maxim generally holds true, that pride goes before destruction. It also intimates that God takes notice, and keeps an account, of all men's proud and haughty words, with which they set heaven and earth at defiance. Those that speak *great swelling words of vanity* shall hear of them again.

(1.) He boasts of the great things he had done to other nations. [1.] He had made their kings his courtiers (v. 8): "*My princes are altogether kings*. Those that are now my princes are such as have been kings." Or he means that he had raised his throne to such a degree that his servants, and those that were in command under him, were as great, and lived in as much pomp, as the kings of other countries. Or those that were absolute princes in their own dominions held their crowns under him, and did him homage. This was a vainglorious boast; but how great is our God whom we serve, who is indeed King of kings, and whose subjects are made to him kings! Rev. i. 6. [2.] He had made himself master of their cities. He names several (v. 9) that were all alike reduced by him. *Cairo* soon yielded as *Carchemish* did, *Hamath* could not hold out any more than *Arpad*, and *Samaria* had become his as well as *Damascus*. To support his boasts he is obliged to bring the victories of his predecessor into the account; for it was he that conquered Samaria, not Sennacherib. [3.] He had been too hard for their idols, their tutelar gods, *had found out the kingdoms of the idols* and found out ways to make them his own, v. 10. Their kingdoms took denomination from the idols they worshipped; the Moabites are called *the people of Chemosh* (Jer. xlviii. 46), because they imagined their gods were their patrons and protectors; and therefore Sennacherib vainly imagined that every conquest



of a kingdom was the conquest of a god. [4.] He had enlarged his own dominions, and removed the bounds of the people (v. 13), enclosing many large territories within the limits of his own kingdom and shifting a great way further the ancient land-marks which his fathers had set; he could not bear to be hemmed in so closely, but must have more room to thrive. By his removing the border of the people Mr. White understands his arbitrarily transplanting colonies from place to place, which was the constant practice of the Assyrians in all their conquests; and this is a probable interpretation. [5.] He had enriched himself with their wealth, and brought it into his own exchequer: *I have robbed their treasures*. In this he said truly. Great conquerors are often no better than great robbers. [6.] He had mastered all the opposition he met with: "*I have put down the inhabitants as a valiant man*." Those that sat high, and thought they sat firmly, I have humbled and made to come down."

(2.) He boasts of the manner in which he had done them. [1.] That he had done all this by his own policy and power (v. 13): "*By the strength of my hand, for I am valiant; and by my wisdom, for I am prudent*;" not by the permission of Providence and the blessing of God. He knows not that it is God that makes him what he is, and puts the staff into his hand, but sacrifices to his own net, Hab. i. 16. "This wealth is all gotten by my might and the power of my hand," Deut. viii. 17. Downright atheism and profaneness, as well as pride and vanity, are at the bottom of men's attributing their prosperity and success thus to themselves and their own conduct, and raising their own character upon it. [2.] That he had done all this with a great deal of ease, and had made but a sport and diversion of it, as if he had been taking birds' nests (v. 14): *My hand has found as a nest the riches of the people*; and when he had found them there was no more difficulty in taking them than in rifling a nest, nor any more reluctance or regret within his own breast in destroying families and cities than in destroying crows'-nests; killing children was no more to him than killing birds. "*As one gathers the eggs that are left in the nest by the dam, so easily have I gathered all the earth*." Like Alexander, he thought he had conquered the world; and whatever prey he seized there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped, as birds do when their nests are rifled. They durst not make any opposition, no, nor any complaint; such awe did they stand in of this mighty conqueror. They were so weak that they knew it was to no purpose to resist, and he was so arbitrary that they knew it was to no purpose to complain. Strange that ever men who were made to do good should take a pride and a pleasure in doing wrong, and doing mischief to all about them without control, and should

reckon that their glory which is their shame! But *their day will come to fall who thus make themselves the terror of the mighty, and much more of the feeble, in the land of the living*.

(3.) He threatens what he will do to Jerusalem, which he was now about to lay siege to, v. 10, 11. He would master Jerusalem and her idols, as he had subdued other places and their idols, particularly Samaria. [1.] He blasphemously calls the God of Israel an idol, and sets him on a level with the false gods of other nations, as if none were the true God but Mithras, the sun, whom he worshipped. See how ignorant he was, and then we shall the less wonder that he was so proud. [2.] He prefers the graven images of other countries before those of Jerusalem and Samaria, when he might have known that the worshippers of the God of Israel were expressly forbidden to make any graven images, and if any did it must be by stealth, and therefore they could not be so rich and pompous as those of other nations. If he means the ark and the mercy-seat, he speaks like himself, very foolishly, and as one that judged by the sight of the eye, and might therefore be easily deceived in matters of spiritual concern. Those who make external pomp and splendour a mark of the true church go by the same rule. [3.] Because he had conquered Samaria, he concluded Jerusalem would fall of course: "*Shall not I do so to Jerusalem?*" can I not as easily, and may I not as justly?" But it did not follow; for Jerusalem adhered to her God, whereas Samaria had forsaken him.

III. See how God, in his justice, rebukes his pride and reads his doom. We have heard what the great king, the king of Assyria, says, and how big he talks. Let us now hear what the great God has to say by his servant the prophet, and we shall find that, wherein he deals proudly, God is above him.

1. He shows the vanity of his insolent and audacious boasts (v. 15): *Shall the axe boast itself against him that hews therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that draws it?* So absurd are the boasts of this proud man. "O what a dust do I make!" said the fly upon the cart-wheel in the fable. "What destruction do I make among the trees!" says the axe. Two ways the axe may be said to *boast itself against him that hews with it*:—(1.) By way of resistance and opposition. Sennacherib blasphemed God, insulted him, threatened to serve him as he had served the gods of the nations; now this was as if the axe should fly in the face of him that hews with it. The tool striving with the workman is no less absurd than the clay striving with the potter; and as it is a thing not to be justified that men should fight against God with the wit, and wealth, and power, which he gives them, so it is a thing not to be suffered

But if men will be thus proud and daring, and bid defiance to all that is just and sacred, let them expect that God will reckon with them; the more insolent they are the surer and sorer will their ruin be. (2.) By way of rivalry and competition. Shall the axe take to itself the praise of the work it is employed in? So senseless, so absurd was it for Sennacherib to say, *By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, v. 13.* It is as if the rod, when it is shaken, should boast that it guides the hand which shakes it; whereas, *when the staff is lifted up, is it not wood still?* so the last clause may be read. If it be an ensign of authority (as the nobles of the people carried staves, Num. xxi. 18), if it be an instrument of service, either to support a weak man or to correct a bad man, still it is wood, and can do nothing but as it is directed by him that uses it. The psalmist prays that God would make the nations to know that they were but men (Ps. ix. 20), the staff to know that it is but wood.

2. He foretells his fall and ruin.

(1.) That when God had done his work by him he would then do his work upon him, v. 12. For the comfort of the people of God in reference to Sennacherib's invasion, though it was a dismal time with them, let them know, [1.] That God designed to do good to Zion and Jerusalem by this providence. There is a work to be done upon them, which God intends, and which he will perform. Note, When God lets loose the enemies of his church and people, and suffers them for a time to prevail, it is in order to the performing of some great good work upon them; and, when that is done, then, and not till then, he will work deliverance for them. When God brings his people into trouble it is to try them (Dan. xi. 35), to bring sin to their remembrance and humble them for it, and to awaken them to a sense of their duty, to teach them to pray and to love and help one another; and *this must be the fruit, even the taking away of sin, ch. xxvii. 9.* When these points are, in some measure, gained by the affliction, it shall be removed, in mercy (Lev. xxvi. 41, 42), otherwise not; for, as the word, so the rod shall accomplish that for which God sends it. [2.] That when God had wrought this work of grace for his people he would work a work of wrath and vengeance upon their invaders: *I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria.* His big words are here said to come from his stout heart, and they are the fruit of it; for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. Notice is taken too of the glory of his high looks, for a proud look is the indication of a proud spirit. The enemies of the church are commonly very high and haughty; but, sooner or later, God will reckon for their haughtiness. He glories in it as an incontestable proof of his power and sovereignty that he looks upon proud men and abases them, Job xl. 11, &c.

(2.) That, how threatening soever this attempt was upon Zion and Jerusalem, it should certainly be baffled, and broken, and come to nothing, and he should not be able to bring to pass his enterprise, v. 16, 19. Observe,

[1.] Who it is that undertakes his destruction, and will be the author of it; not Hezekiah, or his princes, or the militia of Judah and Jerusalem (what can they do against such a potent force?), but God himself will do it, as *the Lord of hosts, and as the light of Israel.* First, We are sure he can do it, for he is *the Lord of hosts*, of all the hosts of heaven and earth. All the creatures are at his command; he makes what use he pleases of them and lays what restraints he pleases on them. He is the Lord of the hosts both of Judah and of Assyria, and can give the victory to which he pleases. Let us not fear the hosts of any enemy if we have the Lord of hosts for us. Secondly, We have reason to hope he will do it, for he is *the light of Israel, and his Holy One.* God is light; in him are perfect brightness, purity, and happiness. He is light, for he is the Holy One; his holiness is his glory. He is Israel's light, to direct and counsel his people, to favour and countenance them, and so to gladden and comfort them in the worst of times. He is their Holy One, for he is in covenant with them; his holiness is engaged and employed for them. God's holiness is the saints' comfort; they give thanks at the remembrance of it, and with a great deal of pleasure call him *their Holy One*, Hab. i. 12.

[2.] How this destruction is represented. It shall be, First, As a consumption of the body by a disease: *The Lord shall send leanness among his fatnesses, or his fat ones.* His numerous army, that was like a body covered with fatness, shall be diminished, and waste away, and become like a skeleton. Secondly, As a consumption of buildings, or trees and bushes, by fire: *Under his glory, that very thing which he glories in, he will kindle a burning, as the burning of a fire,* which shall lay his army in ruins as suddenly as a raging fire lays a stately house in ashes. Some make it an allusion to the fire kindled under the sacrifices; for proud sinners fall as sacrifices to divine justice. Observe, 1. How this fire shall be kindled, v. 17. The same God that is a rejoicing light to those that serve him faithfully will be a consuming fire to those that trifle with him or rebel against him. *The light of Israel shall be for a fire* to the Assyrians, as the same pillar of cloud was a light to the Israelites and a terror to the Egyptians in the Red Sea. What can oppose, what can extinguish, such a fire? 2. What desolation it shall make: *It shall burn and devour its thorns and briers, his officers and soldiers, which are of little worth, and vexations to God's Israel, as thorns and briers, whose end is to be burned, and which are easily and quickly consumed by*



a devouring fire. "*Who would set the briers and thorns against me in battle? They would be so far from stopping the fire that they would inflame it. I would go through them and burn them together* (ch. xxvii. 4); they shall be devoured in one day, all cut off in an instant." When they cried not only Peace and safety, but Victory and triumph, then sudden destruction came; it came surprisingly, and was completed in a little time. "*Even the glory of his forest* (v. 18), the choice troops of his army, the veterans, the troops of the household, the bravest regiments he had, that he was most proud of and depended most upon, that he valued as men do their timber-trees (the glory of their forest) or their fruit-trees (the glory of their Carmel), shall be put as briers and thorns before the fire; they shall be consumed both soul and body, entirely consumed, not only a limb burned, but life taken away." Note, God is able to destroy both soul and body, and therefore we should fear him more than man, who can but kill the body. Great armies before him are but as great woods, which he can fell or fire when he pleases.

[3.] What would be the effect of this great slaughter. The prophet tells us, *First*, That the army would hereby be reduced to a very small number: *The rest of the trees of his forest shall be few*; very few shall escape the sword of the destroying angel, so few that there needs no artist, no muster-master or secretary of war, to take an account of them, for even a *child may soon reckon the numbers of them, and write the names of them*. *Secondly*, That those few who remained should be quite dispirited: *They shall be as when a standard-bearer fainteth*. When he either falls or flees, and his colours are taken by the enemy, this discourages the whole army, and puts them all into confusion. Upon the whole matter we must say, *Who is able to stand before this great and holy Lord God?*

20 And it shall come to pass in that day, *that the remnant of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again stay upon him that smote them; but shall stay upon the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth*. 21 The remnant shall return, *even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God*. 22 For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, *yet a remnant of them shall return: the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness*. 23 For the Lord God of hosts shall make a consumption, even determined, in the midst of all the land.

The prophet had said (v. 12) that *the Lord*

would perform his whole work upon Mount Zion and upon Jerusalem, by Sennacherib's invading the land. Now here we are told what that work should be, a twofold work:—

1. The conversion of some, to whom this providence should be sanctified and yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness, though for the present it was not joyous, but grievous: these are but a remnant (v. 22), *the remnant of Israel* (v. 20), *the remnant of Jacob* (v. 21), but a very few in comparison with the vast numbers of the people of Israel, who were as the sand of the sea. Note, Converting work is wrought but on a remnant, who are distinguished from the rest and set apart for God. When we see how populous Israel is, how numerous the members of the visible church are, as the sand of the sea, and yet consider that of these a remnant only shall be saved, that of the many that are called there are but few chosen, we shall surely *strive to enter in at the strait gate* and fear lest we *seem to come short*. This remnant of Israel are said to be *such as had escaped of the house of Jacob*, such as escaped the corruptions of the house of Jacob, and kept their integrity in times of common apostasy; and that was a fair escape. And therefore they escape the desolations of that house, and shall be preserved in safety in times of common calamity; and that also will be a fair and narrow escape. *Their lives shall be given them for a prey*, Jer. xlv. 5. *The righteous scarcely are saved*. Now, 1. This remnant shall come off from all confidence in an arm of flesh, this providence shall cure them of that: "*They shall no more again stay upon him that smote them*, shall never depend upon the Assyrians, as they have done, for help against their other enemies, finding that they are themselves their worst enemies." *Ictus piscator sapit—sufferings teach caution*. "*They have now learned by dear-bought experience the folly of leaning upon that staff as a stay to them which may perhaps prove a staff to beat them*." It is part of the covenant of a returning people (Hos. xiv. 3), *Assyria shall not save us*. Note, By our afflictions we may learn not to make creatures our confidence. 2. They shall come home to God, to the mighty God (one of the names given to the Messiah, ch. ix. 6), to the Holy One of Israel: "*The remnant shall return* (that was signified by the name of the prophet's son, *Shear-jashub*, ch. vii. 3), *even the remnant of Jacob*. They shall return, after the raising of the siege of Jerusalem, not only to the quiet possession of their houses and lands, but to God and to their duty; they shall repent, and pray, and seek his face, and reform their lives." The remnant that escape are a returning remnant: they shall return to God, and shall stay upon him. Note, Those only may with comfort stay upon God that return to him; then may we have a humble confidence in God when we make conscience of

our duty to him. They shall stay upon the Holy One of Israel, in truth, and not in pretence and profession only. This promise of the conversion and salvation of a remnant of Israel is applied by the apostle (Rom. ix. 27) to the remnant of the Jews which at the first preaching of the gospel received and entertained it, and sufficiently proves that it was no new thing for God to abandon to ruin a great many of the seed of Abraham and yet preserve his promise to Abraham in full force and virtue; for so it was now. The number of the children of Israel was as the sand of the sea (according to the promise, Gen. xxii. 17), and yet only a remnant shall be saved.

II. The consumption of others: *The Lord God of hosts shall make a consumption, v. 23.* This is not meant (as that v. 18) of the consumption of the Assyrian army, but of the consumption of the estates and families of many of the Jews by the Assyrian army. This is taken notice of to magnify the power and goodness of God in the escape of the distinguished remnant, and to let us know what shall become of those that will not return to God; they shall be wasted away by this consumption, this general decay in the midst of the land. Observe, 1. It is a consumption of God's own making; he is the author of it. The Lord God of hosts, whom none can resist, shall make this consumption. 2. It is decreed. It is not the product of a sudden resolve, but was before ordained. It is determined, not only that there shall be such a consumption, but it is cut out (so the word is); it is particularly appointed how far it shall extend and how long it shall continue, who shall be consumed by it and who not. 3. It is an overflowing consumption, that shall overspread the land, and, like a mighty torrent or inundation, bear down all before it. 4. Though it overflows, it is not at random, but in righteousness, which signifies both wisdom and equity. God will justly bring this consumption upon a provoking people, but he will wisely and graciously set bounds to it. *Hitherto it shall come, and no further.*

24 Therefore thus saith the Lord God of hosts, O my people that dwellest in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrian: he shall smite thee with a rod, and shall lift up his staff against thee, after the manner of Egypt. 25 For yet a very little while, and the indignation shall cease, and mine anger in their destruction. 26 And the Lord of hosts shall stir up a scourge for him according to the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb: and as his rod was upon the sea, so shall he lift it up after the manner of Egypt. 27 And

it shall come to pass in that day, that his burden shall be taken away from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from off thy neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing. 28 He is come to Aiath, he is passed to Migron; at Michmash he hath laid up his carriages: 29 They are gone over the passage: they have taken up their lodging at Geba; Ramah is afraid; Gibeah of Saul is fled. 30 Lift up thy voice, O daughter of Galim: cause it to be heard unto Laish, O poor Anathoth. 31 Madmenah is removed; the inhabitants of Gebim gather themselves to flee. 32 As yet shall he remain at Nob that day: he shall shake his hand against the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem. 33 Behold, the Lord, the Lord of hosts, shall lop the bough with terror: and the high ones of stature shall be hewn down, and the haughty shall be humbled. 34 And he shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one.

The prophet, in his preaching, distinguishes between the precious and the vile; for God in his providence, even in the same providence, does so. He speaks terror, in Sennacherib's invasion, to the hypocrites, who were the people of God's wrath, v. 6. But here he speaks comfort to the sincere, who were the people of God's love. The judgment was sent for the sake of the former; the deliverance was wrought for the sake of the latter. Here we have,

I. An exhortation to God's people not to be frightened at this threatening calamity, nor to be put into any confusion or consternation by it. *Let the sinners in Zion be afraid (ch. xxxiii. 14); but O my people, that dwellest in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrian, v. 24.* Note, It is against the mind and will of God that his people, whatever may happen, should give way to that fear which has torment and amazement. Those that dwell in Zion, where God dwells and where his people attend him, and are employed in his service, that are under the protection of the bulwarks that are round about Zion (Ps. xlviii. 13), need not be afraid of any enemy. Let their souls dwell at ease in God.

II. Considerations offered for the silencing of their fear.

1. The Assyrian shall do nothing against them but what God has appointed and determined. They are here told beforehand what he shall do, that it may be no surprise to them: "He shall smite thee by the divine



permission, but it shall be only *with a rod* to correct thee, not with a sword to wound and kill; nay, *he shall but lift up his staff against thee*, threaten thee, and frighten thee, and shake the rod at thee, *after the manner of Egypt*, as the Egyptians shook their staff against your fathers at the Red Sea, when they said, *We will pursue, we will overtake* (Exod. xv. 9), but could not reach to do them any hurt." Note, We should not be frightened at those enemies that can do no more than frighten us.

2. The storm shall soon blow over (v. 25): *Yet a very little while—a little, little while* (so the word is), *and the indignation shall cease, even my anger, which is the staff in their hand* (v. 5), so that when that ceases they are disarmed and disabled to do any further mischief. Note, God's anger against his people is but for a moment (Ps. xxx. 5), and when that ceases, and is turned away from us, we need not fear the fury of any man, for it is impotent passion.

3. The enemy that threatens them shall himself be reckoned with. God's anger against his people shall cease in the destruction of their enemies; when he turns away his wrath from Israel he shall turn it against the Assyrian; and the rod with which he corrected his people shall not only be laid aside, but thrown into the fire. He *lifted up his staff* against Zion, but God *shall stir up a scourge for him* (v. 26); he is a terror to God's people, but God will be a terror to him. The destroying angel shall be this scourge, which he can neither flee from nor contend with. The prophet, for the encouragement of God's people, quotes precedents, and puts them in mind of what God had done formerly against the enemies of his church, who were very strong and formidable, but were brought to ruin. The destruction of the Assyrian shall be, (1.) *According to the slaughter of Midian* (which was effected by an invisible power, but effected suddenly, and it was a total rout); and as, *at the rock of Oreb*, one of the princes of Midian, after the battle, was slain, so shall Sennacherib be in the temple of his god Nisroch, after the defeat of his forces, when he thinks the bitterness of death is past. Compare with this Ps. lxxxiii. 11, *Make their nobles like Oreb and like Zeeb*; and see how God's promises and his people's prayers agree. (2.) *As his rod was upon the sea*, the Red Sea, as Moses' rod was upon that, to divide it first for the escape of Israel and then to close it again for the destruction of their pursuers, so shall his rod now be *lifted up, after the manner of Egypt*, for the deliverance of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Assyrian. Note, It is good to observe a resemblance between God's latter and former appearances for his people, and against his and their enemies.

4. They shall be wholly delivered from the power of the Assyrian, and from the fear of it, v. 27. "They shall not only be eased

of the Assyrian army, which is now quartered upon them and which is a grievous yoke and burden to them, but they shall no more pay that tribute to the king of Assyria which before this invasion he exacted from them (2 Kings xviii. 14), shall be no longer at his service, nor lie at his mercy, as they have done; nor shall he ever again put the country under contribution." Some think it looks further, to the deliverance of the Jews out of their captivity in Babylon; and further yet, to the redemption of believers from the tyranny of sin and Satan. The yoke shall not only be taken away, but it *shall be destroyed*. The enemy shall no more recover his strength, to do the mischief he has done; and this *because of the anointing*, for their sakes who were partakers of the anointing. (1.) For Hezekiah's sake, who was the anointed of the Lord, who had been an active reformer, and was dear to God. (2.) For David's sake. This is particularly given as the reason why God would defend Jerusalem from Sennacherib (ch. xxxvii. 35), *For my own sake, and for my servant David's sake*. (3.) For his people Israel's sake, the good people among them that had received the unction of divine grace. (4.) For the sake of the Messiah, the Anointed of God, whom God had an eye to in all the deliverances of the Old-Testament church, and hath still an eye to in all the favours he shows to his people. It is for his sake that the yoke is broken, and that we are made free indeed.

III. A description both of the terror of the enemy and the terror with which many were struck by it, and the folly of both exposed, v. 28, to the end. Here observe,

1. How formidable the Assyrians were and how daring and threatening they affected to appear. Here is a particular description of the march of Sennacherib, what course he steered, what swift advances he made: *He has come to Aiath, &c.* "This and the other place he has made himself master of, and has met with no opposition." *At Michmash he has laid up his carriages*, as if he had no further occasion for his heavy artillery, so easily was every place he came to reduced; or the store-cities of Judah, which were fortified for that purpose, had now become his magazines. Some remarkable pass, and an important one, he had taken: *They have gone over the passage*.

2. How cowardly the men of Judah were, the degenerate seed of that lion's whelp: *They were afraid*: they fled upon the first alarm, and did not offer to make any head against the enemy. Their apostasy from God had dispirited them, so that one chased a thousand of them. Instead of a valiant shout, to animate one another, nothing was heard but lamentation, to discourage and weaken one another. And *poor Anathoth*, a priests' city, that should have been a pattern of courage, shrieks louder than any.

v. 30. With respect to those that *gathered themselves* together, it was not to fight, but to flee by consent, v. 31. This is designed either, (1.) To show how fast the news of the enemy's progress flew through the kingdom: *He has come to Aiath*, says one; nay, says another, *He has passed to Migron*, &c. And yet, perhaps, it was not altogether so bad as common fame represented it. But we must watch against the fear, not only of evil things, but of evil tidings, which often make things worse than really they are, Ps. cxii. 7. Or, (2.) To show what imminent danger Jerusalem was in, when its enemies made so many bold advances towards it and its friends could not make one bold stand to defend it. Note, The more daring the church's enemies are, and the more dastardly those are that should appear for her, the more will God be exalted in his own strength, when, notwithstanding this, he works deliverance for her.

3. How impotent his attempt upon Jerusalem shall be: *He shall remain at Nob*, whence he may see Mount Zion, and there *he shall shake his hand* against it, v. 32. He shall threaten it, and that shall be all; it shall be safe, and shall set him at defiance. The daughter of Jerusalem, to be even with him, shall *shake her head* at him, ch. xxxvii. 22.

4. How fatal it would prove, in the issue, to himself. When he *shakes his hand at Jerusalem*, and is about to lay hands on it, then is God's time to appear against him; for Zion is the place of which God has said, *This is my rest for ever*; therefore those who threaten it affront God himself. Then *the Lord shall lop the bough with terror and cut down the thickets of the forest*, v. 33, 34. (1.) The pride of the enemy shall be humbled, the boughs that are lifted up on high shall be lopped off, the high and stately trees shall be hewn down; that is, the haughty shall be humbled. Those that lift up themselves in competition with God or opposition to him shall be abased. (2.) The power of the enemy shall be broken: *The thickets of the forest he shall cut down*. When the Assyrian soldiers were under their arms, and their spears erect, they looked like a forest, like Lebanon; but, when in one night they all became as dead corpses, the pikes were laid on the ground, and Lebanon was of a sudden cut down by a mighty one, by the destroying angel, who in a little time slew so many thousands of them: and, if this shall be the exit of that proud invader, let not God's people be afraid of him. *Who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die?*

#### CHAP. XI.

It is a very good transition in prophecy (whether it be so in rhetoric or no), and a very common one, to pass from the prediction of the temporal deliverance of the church to that of the great salvation, which in the fulness of time should be wrought out by Jesus Christ, of which the other were types and figures, to which all the prophets bore witness; and so the ancient Jews understood

them. For what else was it that raised so great an expectation of the Messiah at the time he came. Upon occasion of the prophecy of the deliverance of Jerusalem from Sennacherib, here comes in a prophecy concerning Messiah the Prince. I. His rise out of the house of David, ver. 1. II. His qualifications for his great undertaking, ver. 2, 3. III. The justice and equity of his government, ver. 3—5. IV. The peaceableness of his kingdom, ver. 6—9. V. The accession of the Gentiles to it (ver. 10), and with them the remnant of the Jews, that should be united with them in the Messiah's kingdom, ver. 11—16. And of all this God would now shortly give them a type, and some dark representation, in the excellent government of Hezekiah, the great peace which the nation should enjoy under him, after the ruin of Sennacherib's design, and the return of many of the ten tribes out of their dispersion to their brethren of the land of Judah, when they enjoyed that great tranquillity.

AND there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots: 2 And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; 3 And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: 4 But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. 5 And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. 6 The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. 7 And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. 8 And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. 9 They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

The prophet had before, in this sermon, spoken of a child that should be born, a son that should be given, on whose shoulders the government should be, intending this for the comfort of the people of God in times of trouble, as dying Jacob, many ages before, had intended the prospect of Shiloh for the comfort of his seed in their affliction in Egypt. He had said (ch. x. 27) that *the yoke*



*should be destroyed because of the anointing*; now here he tells us on whom that anointing should rest. He foretels,

I. That the Messiah should, in due time, arise out of the house of David, as that *branch of the Lord* which he had said (*ch. iv. 2*) should be excellent and glorious; the word is *Netzer*, which some think is referred to in *Matt. ii. 23*, where it is said to be spoken by the prophets of the Messiah that he *should be called a Nazarene*. Observe here, 1. Whence this branch should arise—from *Jesse*. He should be the son of David, with whom the covenant of royalty was made, and to whom it was promised with an oath that *of the fruit of his loins God would raise up Christ*, *Acts ii. 30*. David is often called the *son of Jesse*, and Christ is called so, because he was to be not only the Son of David, but David himself, *Hos. iii. 5*. 2. The meanness of his appearance. (1.) He is called a *rod*, and a *branch*; both the words here used signify a weak, small, tender product, a *twig* and a *sprig* (so some render them), such as is easily broken off. The enemies of God's church were just before compared to strong and stately boughs (*ch. x. 33*), which will not, without great labour, be hewn down, but Christ to a tender branch (*ch. liii. 2*); yet he shall be victorious over them. (2.) He is said to come out of *Jesse* rather than David, because *Jesse* lived and died in meanness and obscurity; his family was of small account (*1 Sam. xviii. 18*), and it was in a way of contempt and reproach that David was sometimes called the *son of Jesse*, *1 Sam. xxii. 7*. (3.) He comes forth out of the *stem*, or *stump*, of *Jesse*. When the royal family, that had been as a cedar, was cut down, and only the stump of it left, almost levelled with the ground and lost in the grass of the field (*Dan. iv. 15*), yet it shall sprout again (*Job xiv. 7*); nay, it *shall grow out of his roots*, which are quite buried in the earth, and, like the roots of flowers in the winter, have no stem appearing above ground. The house of David was reduced and brought very low at the time of Christ's birth, witness the obscurity and poverty of Joseph and Mary. The Messiah was thus to begin his estate of humiliation, for submitting to which he should be highly exalted, and would thus give early notice that his kingdom was not of this world. The Chaldee paraphrase reads this, *There shall come forth a King from the sons of Jesse, and the Messiah (or Christ) shall be anointed out of his sons' sons*.

II. That he should be every way qualified for that great work to which he was designed, that this tender branch should be so watered with the dews of heaven as to become a strong rod for a sceptre to rule, *v. 2. 1*. In general, *the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him*. The Holy Spirit, in all his gifts and graces, shall not only come, but rest

and abide upon him; he shall have the Spirit not by measure, but without measure, the fulness of the Godhead dwelling in him, *Col. i. 19*; *ii. 9*. He began his preaching with this (*Luke iv. 18*), *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me*. 2. In particular, the spirit of government, by which he should be every way fitted for that judgment which the Father has committed to him and *given him authority to execute* (*John v. 22, 27*), and not only so, but should be made the fountain and treasury of all grace to believers, that from his fulness they might all receive the Spirit of grace, as all the members of the body derive animal spirits from the head. (1.) He shall have *the spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and knowledge*; he shall thoroughly understand the business he is to be employed in. *No man knows the Father but the Son*, *Matt. xi. 27*. What he is to make known to the children of men concerning God, and his mind and will, he shall be himself acquainted with and apprised of, *John i. 18*. He shall know how to administer the affairs of his spiritual kingdom in all the branches of it, so as effectually to answer the two great intentions of it, the glory of God and the welfare of the children of men. The terms of the covenant shall be settled by him, and ordinances instituted, in wisdom: treasures of wisdom shall be hid in him; he shall be our counsellor, and shall be made of God to us wisdom. (2.) *The spirit of courage, or might, or fortitude*. The undertaking was very great, abundance of difficulty must be broken through, and therefore it was necessary that he should be so endowed that he *might not fail or be discouraged*, *ch. xlii. 4*. He was famed for courage in his teaching the way of God in truth, and not caring for any man, *Matt. xxii. 16*. (3.) *The spirit of religion, or the fear of the Lord*—not only he shall himself have a reverent affection for his Father, as his servant (*ch. xlii. 1*), and he was heard in *that he feared* (*Heb. v. 7*), but he shall have a zeal for religion, and shall design the advancement of it in his whole undertaking. Our faith in Christ was never designed to supersede and jostle out, but to increase and support, our fear of the Lord.

III. That he should be accurate, and critical, and very exact in the administration of his government and the exercise of the power committed to him (*v. 3*): *The Spirit wherewith he shall be clothed shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord*—of an acute snell or scent (so the word is), for the apprehensions of the mind are often expressed by the sensations of the body. Note, 1. Those are most truly and valuably intelligent that are so in the fear of the Lord, in the business of religion, for that is both the foundation and top-stone of wisdom. 2. By this it will appear that we have the Spirit of God, if we have spiritual

senses exercised, and are of *quick understanding in the fear of the Lord*. Those have divine illumination that know their duty and know how to go about it. 3. Therefore Jesus Christ had the spirit without measure, that he might perfectly understand his undertaking; and he did so, as appears not only in the admirable answers he gave to all that questioned with him, which proved him to be of *quick understanding in the fear of the Lord*, but in the management of his whole undertaking. He has settled the great affair of religion so unexceptionably well (so as effectually to secure both God's honour and man's happiness) that, it must be owned, he thoroughly understood it.

IV. That he should be just and righteous in all the acts of his government, and there should appear in it as much equity as wisdom. He shall judge as he expresses it himself, and as he himself would be judged of, John vii. 24. 1. Not according to outward appearance (v. 3): *He shall not judge after the sight of his eyes*, with respect of persons (Job xxxiv. 19) and according to outward shows and appearances, nor *reprove after the hearing of his ears*, by common fame and report, and the representations of others, as men commonly do; nor does he judge of men by the fair words they speak, *calling him, Lord, Lord*, or their plausible actions before the eye of the world, which they do to be seen of men; but he will judge by the hidden man of the heart, and the inward principles men are governed by, of which he is an infallible witness. Christ will judge the secrets of men (Rom. ii. 16), will determine concerning them, not according to their own pretensions and appearances (that were to *judge after the sight of the eyes*), not according to the opinion others have of them (that were to *judge after the hearing of the ears*), but we are sure that *his judgment is according to truth*. 2. He will judge righteous judgment (v. 5): *Righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins*. He shall be righteous in the administration of his government, and his righteousness shall be his girdle; it shall constantly compass him and cleave to him, shall be his ornament and honour; he shall gird himself for every action, shall gird on his sword for war in righteousness; his righteousness shall be his strength, and shall make him expeditious in his undertakings, as a man with his loins girt. In conformity to Christ, his followers must have the girdle of truth (Eph. vi. 14) and it will be the stability of the times. Particularly, (1.) He shall in righteousness plead for the people that are poor and oppressed; he will be their protector (v. 4): *With righteousness shall he judge the poor*; he shall judge in favour and defence of those that have right on their side, though they are poor in the world, and because they are poor in spirit. It is the duty of princes to defend and deliver

the poor (Ps. lxxxii. 3, 4), and the honour of Christ that he is the poor man's King, Ps. lxxii. 2, 4. He shall *debate with evenness for the meek of the earth*, or of the land; those that bear the injuries done them with meekness and patience are in a special manner entitled to the divine care and protection. I, as a deaf man, heard not, for thou wilt hear, Ps. xxxviii. 13, 14. Some read it, *He shall reprove or correct the meek of the earth with equity*. If his own people, the meek of the land, do amiss, he will visit their transgression with the rod. (2.) He shall in righteousness plead against his enemies that are proud and oppressors (v. 4): *But he shall smite the earth*, the man of the earth, that doth oppress (see Ps. x. 18), the men of the world, that *mind earthly things* only (Ps. xvii. 14); these he shall smite *with the rod of his mouth*, the word of his mouth, speaking terror and ruin to them; his threatenings shall take hold of them, and be executed upon them. *With the breath of his lips*, by the operation of his Spirit, according to his word, and working with and by it, *he shall slay the wicked*. He will do it easily, with a word's speaking, as he laid those flat who came to seize him, by saying *I am he*, John xviii. 6. Killing terrors shall arrest their consciences, killing judgments shall ruin them, their power, and all their interests; and in the other world everlasting tribulation will be recompensed to those that trouble his poor people. The apostle applies this to the destruction of the man of sin, whom he calls *that wicked one* (2 Thess. ii. 8) *whom the Lord will consume with the spirit of his mouth*. And the Chaldee here reads it, *He shall slay that wicked Romulus*, or Rome, as Mr. Hugh Broughton understands it.

V. That there should be great peace and tranquillity under his government; this is an explication of what was said in ch. ix. 6, that he should be the Prince of peace. Peace signifies two things:—

1. Unity or concord, which is intimated in these figurative promises, that even the *wolf shall dwell peaceably with the lamb*; men of the most fierce and furious dispositions, who used to bite and devour all about them, shall have their temper so strangely altered by the efficacy of the gospel and grace of Christ that they shall live in love even with the weakest and such as formerly they would have made an easy prey of. So far shall the sheep be from hurting one another, as sometimes they have done (Ezek. xxxiv. 20, 21), that even the wolves shall agree with them. Christ, who is our peace, came to slay all enmities and to settle lasting friendships among his followers, particularly between Jews and Gentiles: when multitudes of both, being converted to the faith of Christ, united in one sheep-fold, then the wolf and the lamb dwelt together; the wolf did not so much



as threaten the lamb, nor was the lamb afraid of the wolf. *The leopard shall not only not tear the kid, but shall lie down with her: even their young ones shall lie down together*, and shall be trained up in a blessed amity, in order to the perpetuating of it. *The lion shall cease to be ravenous and shall eat straw like the ox*, as some think all the beasts of prey did before the fall. *The asp and the cockatrice shall cease to be venomous*, so that parents shall let their children play with them and put their hands among them. A generation of vipers shall become a seed of saints, and the old complaint of *homo homini lupus—man is a wolf to man*, shall be at an end. Those that inhabit the holy mountain shall live as amicably as the creatures did that were with Noah in the ark, and it shall be a means of their preservation, for *they shall not hurt nor destroy one another as they have done*. Now, (1.) This is fulfilled in the wonderful effect of the gospel upon the minds of those that sincerely embrace it; it changes the nature, and makes those that trampled on the meek of the earth, not only meek like them, but affectionate towards them. When Paul, who had persecuted the saints, joined himself to them, then *the wolf dwelt with the lamb*. (2.) Some are willing to hope it shall yet have a further accomplishment in the latter days, when *swords shall be beaten into ploughshares*.

2. Safety or security. Christ, the great Shepherd, shall take such care of his flock that those who would hurt them shall not; they shall not only not destroy one another, but no enemy from without shall be permitted to give them any molestation. The property of troubles, and of death itself, shall be so altered that they shall not do any real hurt to, much less shall they be the destruction of, any that *have their conversation in the holy mountain*, 1 Pet. iii. 13. *Who, or what, can harm us, if we be followers of him that is good?* God's people shall be delivered, not only from evil, but from the fear of it. Even *the sucking child shall without any terror play upon the hole of the asp*; blessed Paul does so when he says, *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?* and, *O death! where is thy sting?*

Lastly, Observe what shall be the effect, and what the cause, of this wonderful softening and sweetening of men's tempers by the grace of God. 1. The effect of it shall be tractableness, and a willingness to receive instruction: *A little child shall lead those who formerly scorned to be controlled by the strongest man*. Calvin understands it of their willing submission to the ministers of Christ, who are to instruct with meekness and not to use any coercive power, but to be as *little children*, Matt. xviii. 3. See 2 Cor. viii. 5. 2. The cause of it shall be the knowledge of God. The more there is of that the more there is of a disposition to

peace. They shall thus live in love, *for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord*, which shall extinguish men's heats and animosities. The better acquainted we are with the God of love the more shall we be changed into the same image and the better affected shall we be to all those that bear his image. The earth shall be as full of this knowledge as the channels of the sea are of water—so broad and extensive shall this knowledge be and so far shall it spread—so deep and substantial shall this knowledge be, and so long shall it last. There is much more of the knowledge of God to be got by the gospel of Christ than could be got by the law of Moses; and, whereas then in Judah only was God known, now *all shall know him*, Heb. viii. 11. But that is knowledge falsely so called which sows discord among men; the right knowledge of God settles peace.

10 And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious. 11 And it shall come to pass in that day, *that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people*, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. 12 And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. 13 The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim. 14 But they shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines toward the west; they shall spoil them of the east together: they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab; and the children of Ammon shall obey them. 15 And the Lord shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with his mighty wind shall he shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and make *men go over dry-shod*. 16 And there shall be an highway for the remnant of his people, which shall be left,

from Assyria; like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt.

We have here a further prophecy of the enlargement and advancement of the kingdom of the Messiah, under the type and figure of the flourishing condition of the kingdom of Judah in the latter end of Hezekiah's reign, after the defeat of Sennacherib.

I. This prediction was in part accomplished when the great things God did for Hezekiah and his people proved as an ensign, inviting the neighbouring nations to them to *enquire of the wonders done in the land*, on which errand the king of Babylon's ambassadors came. To them the Gentiles sought; and Jerusalem, the rest or habitation of the Jews, was then glorious, *v. 10*. Then many of the Israelites who belonged to the kingdom of the ten tribes, who upon the destruction of that kingdom by the king of Assyria were forced to flee for shelter into all the countries about and to some that lay very remote, even to the islands of the sea, were encouraged to return to their own country and put themselves under the protection and government of the king of Judah, the rather because it was an Assyrian army by which their country had been ruined and that was now routed. This is said to be a recovery of them *the second time* (*v. 11*), such an instance of the power and goodness of God, and such a reviving to them, as their first deliverance out of Egypt was. Then the *outcasts of Israel* should be gathered in, and brought home, and those of Judah too, who, upon the approach of the Assyrian army, shifted for their own safety. Then the old feud between Ephraim and Judah shall be forgotten, and they shall join against the Philistines and their other common enemies, *v. 13, 14*. Note, Those who have been sharers with each other in afflictions and mercies, dangers and deliverances, ought in consideration thereof to unite for their joint and mutual safety and protection; and it is likely to be well with the church when Ephraim and Judah are one against the Philistines. Then, whatever difficulties there may be in the way of the return of the dispersed, the Lord shall find out some way or other to remove them, as when he brought Israel out of Egypt he dried up the Red Sea and Jordan (*v. 15*) and led them to Canaan through the invincible embarrassments of a vast howling wilderness, *v. 16*. The like will he do this second time, or that which shall be equivalent. When God's time has come for the deliverance of his people mountains of opposition shall become plain before him. Let us not despair therefore when the interests of the church seem to be brought very low; God can soon turn gloomy days into glorious ones.

II. It had a further reference to the days of the Messiah and the accession of the Gentiles to his kingdom; for to these the apostle applies *v. 10*, of which the following verses are a continuation. Rom. xv. 12, *There shall be a root of Jesse; and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, in him shall the Gentiles trust*. That is a key to this prophecy, which speaks of Christ as the root of Jesse, or a branch out of his roots (*v. 1*), a root out of a dry ground, *ch. liii. 2*. He is the root of David (Rev. v. 5), the root and offspring of David Rev. xxii. 16.

1. *He shall stand*, or be set up, for an ensign of the people. When he was crucified he was lifted up from the earth, that, as an ensign or beacon, he might draw the eyes and the hearts of all men unto him, John xii. 32. He is set up as an ensign in the preaching of the everlasting gospel, in which the ministers, as standard-bearers, display the banner of his love, to allure us to him (Cant. i. 4), the banner of his truth, under which we may enlist ourselves, to engage in a holy war against sin and Satan. Christ is the ensign to which the children of God that were scattered abroad are gathered together (John xi. 52), and in him they meet as the centre of their unity.

2. *To him shall the Gentiles seek*. We read of Greeks that did so (John xii. 21, *We would see Jesus*), and upon that occasion Christ spoke of his being lifted up, to draw all men to him. The apostle, from the LXX. (or perhaps the LXX. from the apostle, in the editions after Christ) reads it (Rom. xv. 12), *In him shall the Gentiles trust*; they shall seek to him with a dependence on him.

3. *His rest shall be glorious*. Some understand this of the death of Christ (the triumphs of the cross made even that glorious), others of his ascension, when he sat down to rest at the right hand of God. Or rather it is meant of the gospel church, that Mount Zion of which Christ has said, *This is my rest*, and in which he resides. This, though despised by the world, having upon it the beauty of holiness, is truly glorious, a glorious high throne, Jer. xvii. 12.

4. Both Jews and Gentiles shall be gathered to him, *v. 11*. A remnant of both, a little remnant in comparison, which shall be recovered, as it were, with great difficulty and hazard. As formerly God delivered his people, and gathered them out of all the countries whither they were scattered (Ps. cvi. 47; Jer. xvi. 15, 16), so he will a second time, in another way, by the powerful working of the Spirit of grace with the word. He shall set his hand to do it; he shall exert his power, the arm of the Lord shall be revealed to do it. (1.) There shall be a remnant of the Jews gathered in: *The outcasts of Israel and the dispersed of Judah* (*v. 12*), many of whom, at the time of the bringing of them in to Christ, were Jews of



he dispersion, the twelve tribes that were scattered abroad (James i. 1; 1 Pet. i. 1), shall flock to Christ; and probably more of those scattered Jews were brought into the church, in proportion, than of those which remained in their own land. (2.) Many of the nations, the Gentiles, shall be brought in by the lifting up of the ensign. Jacob foretold concerning Shiloh that to him should the gathering of the people be. Those that were strangers and foreigners shall be made nigh. The Jews were jealous of Christ's going to the dispersed among the Gentiles and of his teaching the Gentiles, John vii. 35.

5. There shall be a happy accommodation between Judah and Ephraim, and both shall be safe from their adversaries and have dominion over them, v. 13, 14. The coalescence between Judah and Israel at that time was a type and figure of the uniting of Jews and Gentiles, who had been so long at variance in the gospel church. *The house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel* (Jer. iii. 18) and become one nation (Ezek. xxxvii. 22); so the Jews and Gentiles are made of *twain one new man* (Eph. ii. 15), and, being at peace one with another, those that are adversaries to them both shall be cut off; for they shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines, as an eagle strikes at her prey, shall spoil those on the west side of them, and then they shall extend their conquests eastward over the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites. The gospel of Christ shall be successful in all parts, and some of all nations shall become obedient to the faith.

6. Every thing that might hinder the progress and success of the gospel shall be taken out of the way. As when God brought Israel out of Egypt he dried up the Red Sea and Jordan before them (ch. lxiii. 11, 12), and as afterwards when he brought up the Jews out of Babylon he *unprepared them their way* (ch. lxii. 10), so when Jews and Gentiles are to be brought together into the gospel church all obstructions shall be removed (v. 15, 16), difficulties that seemed insuperable shall be strangely got over, *the blind shall be led by a way that they knew not*. See ch. xlii. 15, 16; xliii. 19, 20. Converts shall be brought in chariots and in litters, ch. lxvi. 20. Some think it is the further accession of multitudes to the church that is pointed at in that obscure prophecy of the drying up of the river Euphrates, that the way of the kings of the east may be prepared (Rev. xvi. 12), which seems to refer to this prophecy. Note, When God's time has come for the bringing of nations, or particular persons, home to himself, divine grace will be victorious over all opposition. At the presence of the Lord the sea shall flee and Jordan be driven back; and those who set their faces heavenward will find

there are not such difficulties in the way as they thought there were, for there is a highway thither, ch. xxxv. 8.

## CHAP. XII.

The salvation promised in the foregoing chapter was compared to that of Israel "in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt;" so that chapter ends. Now as Moses and the children of Israel then sang a song of praise to the glory of God (Exod. xv. 1) so shall the people of God do in that day when the root of Jesse shall stand for an ensign of the people and shall be the desire and joy of all nations. In that day, 1. Every particular believer shall sing a song of praise for his own interest in that salvation (ver. 1, 3). "Thou shalt say, Lord, I will praise thee." Thanksgiving-work shall be closet-work. 2. Many in concert shall join in praising God for the common benefit arising from this salvation (ver. 4-6): "You shall say, Praise ye the Lord." Thanksgiving-work shall be congregation-work; and the praises of God shall be publicly sung in the congregations of the upright.

AND in that day thou shalt say, O LORD, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. 2 Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation. 3 Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.

This is the former part of the hymn of praise which is prepared for the use of the church, of the Jewish church when God would work great deliverances for them, and of the Christian church when the kingdom of the Messiah should be set up in the world in despite of the opposition of the powers of darkness: *In that day thou shalt say, O Lord! I will praise thee*. The scattered church, being united into one body, shall, as one man, with one mind and one mouth, thus praise God, who is one and his name one. *In that day*, when the Lord shall do these great things for thee, *thou shalt say, O Lord! I will praise thee*. That is,

I. "Thou shalt have cause to say so." The promise is sure, and the blessings contained in it are very rich, and, when they are bestowed, will furnish the church with abundant matter for rejoicing and therefore with abundant matter for thanksgiving. The Old-Testament prophecies of gospel times are often expressed by the joy and praise that shall then be excited; for the inestimable benefits we enjoy by Jesus Christ require the most elevated and enlarged thanksgivings.

II. "Thou shalt have a heart to say so." All God's other gifts to his people shall be crowned with this. He will give them grace to ascribe all the glory of them to him, and to speak of them upon all occasions with thankfulness to his praise. *Thou shalt say*, that is, thou oughtest to say so. *In that day*, when many are brought home to Jesus Christ and flock to him as doves to their windows, instead of envying the kind reception they find with Christ, as the Jews grudged the favour shown to the Gentiles, *thou shalt say, O Lord! I will praise thee*. Note, We ought

to rejoice in, and give thanks for, the grace of God to others as well as to ourselves.

1. Believers are here taught to give thanks to God for the turning away of his displeasure from them and the return of his favour to them (v. 1): *O Lord! I will praise thee, though thou wast angry with me.* Note, Even God's frowns must not put us out of tune for praising him; though he be angry with us, though he slay us, yet we must put our trust in him and give him thanks. God has often just cause to be angry with us, but we have never any reason to be angry with him, nor to speak otherwise than well of him; even when he blames us we must praise him. *Thou wast angry with us, but thy anger is turned away.* Note, (1.) God is sometimes angry with his own people and the fruits of his anger do appear, and they ought to take notice of this, that they may humble themselves under his mighty hand. (2.) Though God may for a time be angry with his people, yet his anger shall at length be turned away; it endures but for a moment, nor will he contend for ever. By Jesus Christ, the root of Jesse, God's anger against mankind was turned away; for *he is our peace.* (3.) Those whom God is reconciled to he comforts; even the turning away of his anger is a comfort to them; yet that is not all: those that are *at peace with God may rejoice in hope of the glory of God*, Rom. v. 1, 2. Nay, God sometimes brings his people into a wilderness that there he may *speak comfortably to them*, Hosea ii. 14. (4.) The turning away of God's anger, and the return of his comforts to us, ought to be the matter of our joyful thankful praises.

2. They are taught to triumph in God and their interest in him (v. 2): "*Behold, and wonder; God is my salvation; not only my Saviour, by whom I am saved, but my salvation, in whom I am safe. I depend upon him as my salvation, for I have found him to be so. He shall have the glory of all the salvations that have been wrought for me, and from him only will I expect the salvations I further need, and not from hills and mountains: and if God be my salvation, if he undertake my eternal salvation, I will trust in him to prepare me for it and preserve me to it. I will trust him with all my temporal concerns, not doubting but he will make all to work for my good. I will be confident, that is, I will be always easy in my own mind.*" Note, Those that have God for their salvation may enjoy themselves with a holy security and serenity of mind. Let faith in God as our salvation be effectual, (1.) To silence our fears. We must *trust; and not be afraid*, not be afraid that the God we trust in will fail us; no, there is no danger of that; not be afraid of any creature, though ever so formidable and threatening. Note, Faith in God is a sovereign remedy against disquieting tormenting fears. (2.) To support our hopes. Is the Lord Jehovah our

salvation? Then he will be our *strength and song*. We have work to do and temptations to resist, and we may depend upon him to enable us for both, to *strengthen us with all might by his Spirit in the inner man*, for he is our strength; his grace is so, and that grace shall be sufficient for us. We have many troubles to undergo, and must expect griefs in a vale of tears; and we may depend upon him to comfort us in all our tribulations, for he is our song; he *giveth songs in the night*. If we make God our strength, and put our confidence in him, he will be our strength; if we make him our song, and place our comfort in him, he will be our song. Many good Christians have God for their strength who have him not for their song; they walk in darkness: but light is sown for them. And those that have God for their strength ought to make him their song, that is, to give him the glory of it (see Ps. lxxviii. 35) and to take to themselves the comfort of it, for he will become their salvation. Observe the title here given to God: *Jah, Jehovah*. *Jah* is the contraction of *Jehovah*, and both signify his eternity and unchangeableness, which are a great comfort to those that depend upon him as their strength and their song. Some make *Jah* to signify the Son of God made man; he is *Jehovah*, and in him we may glory as our strength, and song, and salvation.

3. They are taught to derive comfort to themselves from the love of God and all the tokens of that love (v. 3): "*Therefore, because the Lord Jehovah is your strength and song and will be your salvation, you shall draw water with joy.*" Note, The assurances God has given us of his love, and the experiences we have had of the benefit and comfort of his grace, should greatly encourage our faith in him and our expectations from him: "*Out of the wells of salvation in God, who is the fountain of all good to his people, you shall draw water with joy. God's favour shall flow forth to you, and you shall have the comfort of it and make use of the blessed fruits of it.*" Note, (1.) God's promises revealed, ratified, and given out to us, in his ordinances, are wells of salvation; wells of *the Saviour* (so some read it), for in them the Saviour and salvation are made known to us and made over to us. (2.) It is our duty by faith to draw water out of these wells, to take to ourselves the benefit and comfort that are treasured up for us in them, as those that acknowledge all our fresh springs to be there and all our fresh streams to be thence, Ps. lxxvii. 7. (3.) Water is to be drawn out of the wells of salvation with a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction. It is the will of God that we should rejoice before him and rejoice in him (Deut. xxvi. 11), be joyful in his house of prayer (Isa. lvi. 7), and keep his feasts with gladness, Acts n. 46.

4 And in that day shall ye say,



Praise the LORD, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted. 5 Sing unto the LORD; for he hath done excellent things: this is known in all the earth. 6 Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.

This is the second part of this evangelical song, and to the same purport with the former; there believers stir up themselves to praise God, here they invite and encourage one another to do it, and are contriving to spread his praise and draw in others to join with them in it. Observe,

I. Who are here called upon to praise God—the inhabitants of Zion and Jerusalem, whom God had in a particular manner protected from Sennacherib's violence, v. 6. Those that have received distinguishing favours from God ought to be most forward and zealous in praising him. The gospel church is Zion. Christ is Zion's King. Those that have a place and a name in the church should lay out themselves to diffuse the knowledge of Christ and to bring many to him. *Thou inhabitress of Zion*; the word is feminine. Let the weaker sex be strong in the Lord, and out of their mouth praise shall be perfected.

II. How they must praise the Lord. 1. By prayer: *Call upon his name*. As giving thanks for former mercy is a decent way of begging further mercy, so begging further mercy is graciously accepted as a thankful acknowledgment of the mercies we have received. In calling upon God's name we give unto him some of the glory that is due to his name as our powerful and bountiful benefactor. 2. By preaching and writing. We must not only speak to God, but speak to others concerning him, not only call upon his name, but (as the margin reads it) *proclaim his name*; let others know something more from us than they did before concerning God, and those things whereby he has made himself known. *Declare his doings*, his counsels (so some read it); the work of redemption is according to the counsel of his will, and in that and other wonderful works that he has done we must take notice of his *thoughts which are to us-ward*, Ps. xl. 5. Declare these among the people, among the heathen, that they may be brought into communion with Israel and the God of Israel. When the apostles preached the gospel to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem, then this scripture was fulfilled, that his doings should be declared among the people and that what he has done should be known in all the earth. 3. By a holy exultation and transport of joy: "*Cry out and shout*"; welcome the gospel to yourselves and publish it to others with huzzas and loud acclamations,

as those that *shout for victory* (Exod. xxxiii. 18) or for the coronation of a king," Num. xxiii. 21.

III. For what they must praise the Lord. 1. Because he has glorified himself. Remember it yourselves, and make mention of it to others, that his name is exalted, has become more illustrious and more conspicuous; in this every good man rejoices. 2. Because he has magnified his people: *He has done excellent things* for them, which make them look great and considerable. 3. Because he is, and will be, great among them: *Great is the Holy One*, for he is glorious in holiness; therefore great, because holy. True goodness is true greatness. He is great as the Holy One of Israel, and in the midst of them, praised by them (Ps. lxxvi. 1), manifesting himself among them, and appearing gloriously in their behalf. It is the honour and happiness of Israel that the God who is in covenant with them, and in the midst of them, is infinitely great.

## CHAP. XIII.

Hitherto the prophecies of this book related only to Judah and Israel, and Jerusalem especially; but now the prophet begins to look abroad, and to read the doom of divers of the neighbouring states and kingdoms: for he that is King of saints is also King of nations, and rules in the affairs of the children of men as well as in those of his own children. But the nations to whom these prophecies do relate were all such as the people of God were in some way or other conversant and concerned with, such as had been kind or unkind to Israel, and accordingly God would deal with them, either in favour or in wrath; for the Lord's portion is his people, and to them he has an eye in all the dispensations of his providence concerning those about them, Deut. xxi. 8, 9. The threatenings we find here against Babylon, Moab, Damascus, Egypt, Tyre, &c., were intended for comfort to those in Israel that feared God, but were terrified and oppressed by those potent neighbours, and for alarm to those among them that were wicked. If God would thus severely reckon with those for their sins that knew him not, and made no profession of his name, how severe would he be with those that were called by his name and yet lived in rebellion against him! And perhaps the directing of particular prophecies to the neighbouring nations might invite some of those nations to the reading of the Jews' Bible, and so they might be brought to their religion. This chapter, and that which follows, contain what God had to say to Babylon and Babylon's king, who were at present little known to Israel, but would in process of time become a greater enemy to them than any other had been, for which God would at last reckon with them. In this chapter we have, I. A general rendezvous of the forces that were to be employed against Babylon, ver. 1-5. II. The dreadfully bloody work that those forces should make in Babylon, ver. 6-18. III. The utter ruin and desolation of Babylon, which this should and in, ver. 19-22.

THE burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see. 2 Lift ye up a banner upon the high mountain, exalt the voice unto them, shake the hand, that they may go into the gates of the nobles. 3 I have commanded my sanctified ones, I have also called my mighty ones for mine anger, even them that rejoice in my highness. 4 The noise of a multitude in the mountains, like as of a great people; a tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations gathered together: the LORD of hosts mustereth the host of the battle. 5 They come from a far country, from

the end of heaven, *even* the LORD, and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole land.

The general title of this book was, *The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, ch. i. 1.* Here we have that which Isaiah saw, which was represented to his mind as clearly and fully as if he had seen it with his bodily eyes; but the particular inscription of this sermon is *the burden of Babylon*. 1. It is a burden, a lesson they were to learn (so some understand it), but they would be loth to learn it, and it would be a burden to their memories, or a load which should lie heavily upon them and under which they should sink. Those that will not make the word of God their rest (*ch. xxviii. 12; Jer. vi. 16*) shall find it made a burden to them. 2. It is the burden of Babylon or Babel, which at this time was a dependent upon the Assyrian monarchy (the metropolis of which was Nineveh), but soon after revolted from it and became a monarchy of itself, and a very potent one, in Nebuchadnezzar. This prophet afterwards foretold the captivity of the Jews in Babylon, *ch. xxxix. 6.* Here he foretells the reprisals God would make upon Babylon for the wrongs done to his people. In these verses a summons is given to those powerful and warlike nations whom God would make use of as the instruments of his wrath for the destruction of Babylon: he afterwards names them (*v. 17*) the *Medes*, who, in conjunction with the Persians, under the command of Darius and Cyrus, were the ruin of the Babylonian monarchy.

I. The place doomed to destruction is Babylon; it is here called *the gates of the nobles* (*v. 2*), because of the abundance of nobler's houses that were in it, stately ones and richly furnished, which would invite the enemy to come, in hopes of a rich booty. The gates of nobles were strong and well guarded, and yet they would be no fence against those who came with commission to execute God's judgments. Before his power and wrath palaces are no more than cottages. Nor is it only the gates of the nobles, but *the whole land*, that is doomed to destruction (*v. 5*); for, though the nobles were the leaders in persecuting and oppressing God's people, yet the whole land concurred with them in it.

II. The persons brought together to lay Babylon waste are here called, 1. *God's sanctified ones* (*v. 3*), designed for this service and set apart to it by the purpose and providence of God, disengaged from other projects, that they might wholly apply themselves to this, such as were qualified for that to which they were called, for what work God employs men in he does in some measure fit them for. It intimates likewise that in God's intention, though not in theirs, it was a holy war; they designed only the enlargement of their own empire, but God

designed the release of his people and a type of the destruction of the New-Testament Babylon. Cyrus, the person principally concerned, was justly called a *sanctified one*, for he was God's anointed (*ch. xlv. 1*) and a figure of him that was to come. It is a pity but all soldiers, especially those that fight the Lord's battles, should be in the strictest sense sanctified ones; and it is a wonder that those dare be profane ones who carry their lives in their hands. 2. They are called God's *mighty ones*, because they had their might from God and were now to use it for him. It is said of Cyrus that in this expedition *God held his right hand, ch. xlv. 1.* God's sanctified ones are his mighty ones. Those whom God calls he qualifies; and those whom he makes holy he makes strong in spirit. 3. They are said to rejoice in his highness, that is, to serve his glory and the purposes of it with great alacrity. Though Cyrus did not know God, nor actually design his honour in what he did, yet God used him as his servant (*ch. xlv. 4, I have sur-named thee as my servant, though thou hast not known me*), and he rejoiced in those successes by which God exalted his own name. 4. They are very numerous, *a multitude, a great people, kingdoms of nations* (*v. 4*), not rude and barbarous, but modelled and regular troops, such as are furnished out by well-ordered kingdoms. The great God has hosts at his command. 5. They are far-fetched: *They come from a far country, from the end of heaven.* The vast country of Assyria lay between Babylon and Persia. God can make those a scourge and ruin to his enemies that lie most remote from them and therefore are least dreaded.

III. The summons given them is effectual, their obedience ready, and they make a very formidable appearance: *A banner is lifted up upon the high mountain, v. 2.* God's standard is set up, a flag of defiance hung out against Babylon. It is erected on high, where all may see it; whoever will may come and enlist themselves under it, and they shall be taken immediately into God's pay. Those that beat up for volunteers must *exalt the voice* in making proclamation, to encourage soldiers to come in; they must *shake the hand*, to beckon those at a distance and to animate those that have enlisted themselves. And they shall not do this in vain; God has commanded and called those whom he designs to make use of (*v. 3*) and power goes along with his calls and commands, which cannot be resisted. He that makes men able to serve him can, when he pleases, make them willing too. It is the *Lord of hosts that musters the host of the battle, v. 4.* He raises them, brings them together, puts them in order, reviews them, has an exact account of them in his muster-roll, sees that they be all in their respective posts, and gives them their necessary orders. Note, All the hosts of war are under the command



of the Lord of hosts; and that which makes them truly formidable is that, when they come against Babylon, the Lord comes, and brings them with him as *the weapons of his indignation*, v. 5. Note, Great princes and armies are but tools in God's hand, weapons that he is pleased to make use of in doing his work, and it is his wrath that arms them and gives them success.

6 Howl ye; for the day of the LORD is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty. 7 Therefore shall all hands be faint, and every man's heart shall melt: 8 And they shall be afraid: pangs and sorrows shall take hold of them; they shall be in pain as a woman that travaileth: they shall be amazed one at another; their faces *shall be as flames*. 9 Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. 10 For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine. 11 And I will punish the world for *their* evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. 12 I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir. 13 Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger. 14 And it shall be as the chased roe, and as a sheep that no man taketh up: they shall every man turn to his own people, and flee every one into his own land. 15 Every one that is found shall be thrust through; and every one that is joined *unto them* shall fall by the sword. 16 Their children also shall be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses shall be spoiled, and their wives ravished. 17 Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, which shall not regard silver; and *as for* gold, they shall not delight in it. 18 *Their* bows also shall dash the young

men to pieces; and they shall have no pity on the fruit of the womb; their eye shall not spare children.

We have here a very elegant and lively description of the terrible confusion and desolation which should be made in Babylon by the descent which the Medes and Persians should make upon it. Those that were now secure and easy were bidden to *howl* and make sad lamentation; for,

I. God was about to appear in wrath against them, and it is a fearful thing to fall into his hands: *The day of the Lord is at hand* (v. 6), a little day of judgment, when God will act as a just avenger of his own and his people's injured cause. And there are those who will have reason to tremble when that day is at hand. *The day of the Lord cometh*, v. 9. Men have their day now, and they think to carry the day; but God laughs at them, for he sees that *his day is coming*, Ps. xxxvii. 13. Fury is not with God, and yet his day of reckoning with the Babylonians is said to be *cruel with wrath and fierce anger*. God will deal in severity with them for the severities they exercised upon God's people; with the froward, with the cruel, he will show himself froward, will show himself cruel, and give the blood-thirsty blood to drink.

II. Their hearts shall fail them, and they shall have neither courage nor comfort left; they shall not be able either to resist the judgment coming or to bear up under it, either to oppose the enemy or to support themselves, v. 7, 8. Those that in the day of their peace were *proud*, and *haughty*, and *terrible* (v. 11), shall, when trouble comes, be quite dispirited and at their wits' end: *All hands shall be faint*, and unable to hold a weapon, and *every man's heart shall melt*, so that they shall be ready to die for fear. The pangs of their fear shall be like those of a woman in hard labour, and *they shall be amazed one at another*. In frightening themselves, they shall frighten one another; they shall wonder to see those tremble that used to be bold and daring; or they shall be amazed looking one at another, as men at a loss, Gen. xlii. 1. *Their faces shall be as flames*, pale as flames, through fear (so some), or red as flames sometimes are, blushing at their own cowardice; or their faces shall be as faces scorched with the flame, or as theirs that labour in the fire, *their visage blacker than a coal*, or like a *bottle in the smoke*, Ps. cxix. 83.

III. All comfort and hope shall fail them (v. 10): *The stars of heaven shall not give their light*, but shall be clouded and overcast; *the sun shall be darkened in his going forth*, rising bright, but lost again, a certain sign of foul weather. They shall be as men in distress at sea, when neither sun nor stars appear, Acts xxvii. 20. It shall be as dreadful a time with them as it would be with

the earth if all the heavenly luminaries were turned into darkness, a resemblance of the day of judgment, when the sun shall be turned into darkness. The heavens frowning thus is an indication of the displeasure of the God of heaven. When things look dark on earth, yet it is well enough if all be clear upwards; but, if we have no comfort thence, wherewith shall we be comforted?

IV. God will visit them *for their iniquity*; and all this is intended for the punishment of sin, and particularly the sin of pride, *v. 11*. This puts wormwood and gall into the affliction and misery, 1. That sin must now have its punishment. Though Babylon be a little world, yet, being a wicked world, it shall not go unpunished. Sin brings desolation on the world of the ungodly; and when the kingdoms of the earth are quarrelling with one another it is the fruit of God's controversy with them all. 2. That pride must now have its fall: *The haughtiness of the terrible must now be laid low*, particularly of Nebuchadnezzar and his son Belshazzar, who had, in their pride, trampled upon, and made themselves very terrible to, the people of God. *A man's pride will bring him low*.

V. There shall be so great a slaughter as will produce a scarcity of men (*v. 12*): *I will make a man more precious than fine gold*. You could not have a man to be employed in any of the affairs of state, not a man to be enlisted in the army, not a man to match a daughter to, for the building up of a family, if you would give any money for one. The troops of the neighbouring nations would not be hired into the service of the king of Babylon, because they saw every thing go against him. Populous countries are soon depopulated by war. And God can soon make a kingdom that has been courted and admired to be dreaded and shunned by all, as a house that is falling, or a ship that is sinking.

VI. There shall be a universal confusion and consternation, such a confusion of their affairs that it shall be like the *shaking of the heavens* with dreadful thunders and the *removing of the earth* by no less dreadful earthquakes. All shall go to rack and ruin *in the day of the wrath of the Lord of hosts, v. 13*. And such a consternation shall seize their spirits that Babylon, which used to be like a roaring lion and a raging bear to all about her, shall become *as a chased roe and as a sheep that no man takes up, v. 14*. The army they shall bring into the field, consisting of troops of divers nations (as great armies usually do), shall be so dispirited by their own apprehensions and so dispersed by their enemies' sword that they shall *turn every man to his own people*; each man shall shift for his own safety; *the men of might shall not find their hands* (Ps. lxxvi. 5), but take to their heels.

VII. There shall be a general scene of

blood and horror, as is usual where the sword devours. No wonder that every one makes the best of his way, since the conqueror gives no quarter, but puts all to the sword, and not those only that are found in arms, as is usual with us even in the most cruel slaughters (*v. 15*): *Every one that is found alive shall be run through*, as soon as ever it appears that he is a Babylonian. Nay, because the sword devours one as well as another, *every one that is joined to them shall fall by the sword*; those of other nations that come in to their assistance shall be cut off with them. It is dangerous being in bad company, and helping those whom God is about to destroy. Those particularly that join themselves to Babylon must expect to share in her plagues, Rev. xviii. 4. And, since the most sacred laws of nature, and of humanity itself, are silenced by the fury of war (though they cannot be cancelled, the conquerors shall, in the most barbarous brutish manner, *dash the children to pieces, and ravish the wives. Jusque datum sceleri—Wickedness shall have free course, v. 16*. They had thus dealt with God's people (Lam. v. 11), and now they shall be paid in their own coin, Rev. xiii. 10. It was particularly foretold (Ps. cxxxvii. 9) that the *little ones of Babylon should be dashed against the stones*. How cruel soever and unjust those were that did it, God was righteous who suffered it to be done, and to be done *before their eyes*, to their greater terror and vexation. It was just also that the houses which they had filled with the spoil of Israel should be spoiled and plundered. What is got by rapine is often lost in the same manner.

VIII. The enemy that God will send against them shall be inexorable, probably being by some provocation or other more than ordinarily exasperated against them; or, in whatever way it may be brought about, God himself will *stir up the Medes* to use this severity with the Babylonians. He will not only serve his own purposes by their dispositions and designs, but will put it into their hearts to make this attempt upon Babylon, and suffer them to prosecute it with all this fury. God is not the author of sin, but he would not permit it if he did not know how to bring glory to himself out of it. These Medes, in conjunction with the Persians, shall make thorough work of it; for, 1. They shall take no bribes, *v. 17*. All that men have they would give for their lives, but the Medes *shall not regard silver*; it is blood they thirst for, not gold; no man's riches shall with them be the ransom of his life. 2. They shall show no pity (*v. 18*), not to the *young men* that are in the prime of their time—they shall shoot them through with their bows, and then *dash them to pieces*; not to the age of innocence—they shall have no pity on the *fruit of the womb, nor spare little children*, whose



cries and frights one would think should make even marble eyes to weep, and hearts of adamant to relent. Pause a little here and wonder, (1.) That men should be thus cruel and inhuman, and so utterly divested of all compassion; and in it see how corrupt and degenerate the nature of man has become. (2.) That the God of infinite mercy should suffer it, nay, and should make it to be the execution of his justice, which shows that, though he is gracious, yet he is the God to whom vengeance belongs. (3.) That little infants, who have never been guilty of any actual sin, should be thus abused, which shows that there is an original guilt by which life is forfeited as soon as it is had.

19 And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. 20 It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. 21 But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. 22 And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in *their* pleasant palaces: and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged.

The great havoc and destruction which it was foretold should be made by the Medes and Persians in Babylon here end in the final destruction of it. 1. It is allowed that Babylon was a noble city. It was *the glory of kingdoms and the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency*; it was that *head of gold* (Dan. ii. 37, 38); it was called *the lady of kingdoms* (ch. xlvii. 5), *the praise of the whole earth* (Jer. li. 41), *like a pleasant roe* (so the word signifies); but it shall be as a *chased roe*, v. 14. The Chaldeans gloried in the beauty and wealth of this their metropolis. 2. It is foretold that it should be wholly destroyed, like Sodom and Gomorrah; not so miraculously, nor so suddenly, but as effectually, though gradually; and the destruction should come upon them as that upon Sodom, when they were secure, eating and drinking, Luke xvii. 28, 29. Babylon was taken when Belshazzar was in his revels; and, though Cyrus and Darius did not demolish it, yet by degrees it wasted away and in process of time it went all to ruin. It is foretold here (v. 20) *that it shall never be inhabited*: in Adrian's time nothing remained but the wall. And whereas it is

prophesied concerning Nineveh, that great city, that when it should be deserted and left desolate yet flocks should lie down in the midst of it, it is here said concerning Babylon that *the Arabians, who were shepherds, should not make their folds there*; the country about should be so barren that there would be no grazing there; no, not for sheep. Nay, it shall be the receptacle of *wild beasts*, that affect solitude; the houses of Babylon, where the sons and daughters of pleasure used to rendezvous, *shall be full of doleful creatures, owls and satyrs*, that are themselves frightened thither, as to a place proper for them, and by whom all others are frightened thence. Historians say that this was fulfilled in the letter. Benjamin Bar-Jona, in his Itinerary, speaking of Babel, has these words: "This is that Babel which was of old thirty miles in breadth; it is now laid waste. There are yet to be seen the ruins of a palace of Nebuchadnezzar, but the sons of men dare not enter in, for fear of serpents and scorpions, which possess the place." Let none be proud of their pompous palaces, for they know not but they may become worse than cottages; nor let any think that *their houses shall endure for ever* (Ps. xlix. 11), when perhaps nothing may remain but the ruins and reproaches of them. 3. It is intimated that this destruction should come shortly (v. 22): *Her time is near to come*. This prophecy of the destruction of Babylon was intended for the support and comfort of the people of God when they were captives there and grievously oppressed; and the accomplishment of the prophecy was nearly 200 years after the time when it was delivered; yet it followed soon after the time for which it was calculated. When the people of Israel were groaning under the heavy yoke of Babylonish tyranny, sitting down in tears by the rivers of Babylon and upbraided with the songs of Zion, when their insolent oppressors were most haughty and arrogant (v. 11), then let them know, for their comfort, that Babylon's time, her day to fall, is near to come, and the days of her prosperity shall not be prolonged, as they have been. When God begins with her he will make an end. Thus it is said of the destruction of the New-Testament Babylon, whereof the former was a type, *In one hour has her judgment come*.

## CHAP. XIV.

In this chapter, I. More weight is added to the burden of Babylon, enough to sink it like a mill-stone; 1. It is Israel's cause that is to be pleaded in this quarrel with Babylon, ver. 1-3. 2. The king of Babylon, for the time being, shall be remarkably brought down and triumphed over, ver. 4-20. 3. The whole race of the Babylonians shall be cut off and extirpated, ver. 21-23. II. A confirmation of the prophecy of the destruction of Babylon, which was a thing at a distance, is here given in the prophecy of the destruction of the Assyrian army that invaded the land, which happened not long after, ver. 24-27. III. The success of Hezekiah against the Philistines is here foretold, and the advantage which his people would gain thereby, ver. 28-32.

**F**OR the LORD will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Is-

rael, and set them in their own land: and the strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob. 2 And the people shall take them, and bring them to their place: and the house of Israel shall possess them in the land of the LORD for servants and handmaids: and they shall take them captives, whose captives they were; and they shall rule over their oppressors. 3 And it shall come to pass in the day that the LORD shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve,—

This comes in here as the reason why Babylon must be overthrown and ruined, because God has mercy in store for his people, and therefore, 1. The injuries done to them must be reckoned for and revenged upon their persecutors. Mercy to Jacob will be wrath and ruin to Jacob's impenitent implacable adversaries, such as Babylon was. 2. The yoke of oppression which Babylon had long laid on their necks must be broken off, and they must be set at liberty; and, in order to this, the destruction of Babylon is as necessary as the destruction of Egypt and Pharaoh was to their deliverance out of that house of bondage. The same prediction is a promise to God's people and a threatening to their enemies, as the same providence has a bright side towards Israel and a black or dark side towards the Egyptians. Observe,

I. The ground of these favours to Jacob and Israel—the kindness God had for them and the choice he had made of them (v. 1): "*The Lord will have mercy on Jacob*, the seed of Jacob now captives in Babylon; he will make it to appear that he has compassion on them and has mercy in store for them, and that he will not contend for ever with them, but *will yet choose them*, will yet again return to them; though he has seemed for a time to refuse and reject them, he will show that they are his chosen people and that the election stands sure." However it may seem to us, God's mercy is not gone, nor does his promise fail, Ps. lxxvii. 8.

II. The particular favours he designed them. 1. He would bring them back to their native soil and air again: *The Lord will set them in their own land*, out of which they were driven. A settlement in the holy land, the land of promise, is a fruit of God's mercy, distinguishing mercy. 2. Many should be proselyted to their holy religion, and should return with them, induced to do so by the manifest tokens of God's favourable presence with them, the operations of God's grace in them, and his providence for them: *Strangers shall be joined with them*,

saying, *We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you*, Zech. viii. 23. It adds much to the honour and strength of Israel when strangers are joined with them and there are added to the church many from without, Acts ii. 47. Let not the church's children be shy of strangers, but receive those whom God receives, and own those who cleave to the house of Jacob. 3. These proselytes should not only be a credit to their cause, but very helpful and serviceable to them in their return home: *The people among whom they live shall take them, take care of them, take pity on them, and shall bring them to their place*—as friends, loth to part with such good company—as servants, willing to do them all the good offices they could. God's people, wherever their lot is cast, should endeavour thus, by all the instances of an exemplary and winning conversation, to gain an interest in the affections of those about them, and recommend religion to their good opinion. This was fulfilled in the return of the captives from Babylon, when all that were about them, pursuant to Cyrus's proclamation, contributed to their removal (Ezra i. 4, 6), not as the Egyptians, because they were sick of them, but because they loved them. 4. They should have the benefit of their service when they had returned home, for many would of choice go with them in the meanest post, rather than not go with them: *They shall possess them in the land of the Lord for servants and handmaids*; and as the laws of that land saved it from being the purgatory of servants, providing that they should not be oppressed, so the advantages of that land made it the paradise of those servants that had been strangers to the covenants of promise, for there was *one law to the stranger and to those that were born in the land*. Those whose lot is cast in the land of the Lord, a land of light, should take care that their servants and handmaids may share in the benefit of it, who will then find it better to be possessed in the Lord's land than possessors in any other. 5. They should triumph over their enemies, and those that would not be reconciled to them should be reduced and humbled by them: *They shall take those captives whose captives they were and shall rule over their oppressors*, righteously, but not revengefully. The Jews perhaps bought Babylonian prisoners out of the hands of the Medes and Persians and made slaves of them. Or this might have its accomplishment in their victories over their enemies in the times of the Maccabees. It is applicable to the success of the gospel (when those were brought into obedience to it who had made the greatest opposition to it, as Paul) and to the interest believers have in Christ's victories over their spiritual enemies, when he led captivity captive, to the power they gain over their own corruptions, and to the dominion the upright shall have in the morn-



ing, Ps. xlix. 14. 6. They should see a happy termination of all their grievances (v. 3): *The Lord shall give thee rest from thy sorrow and thy fear, and from thy hard bondage.* God himself undertakes to work a blessed change, (1.) In their state. They shall have rest from their bondage; the days of their affliction, though many, shall have an end; and the rod of the wicked, though it lie long, shall not always lie on their lot. (2.) In their spirit. They shall have rest from their sorrow and fear, sense of their present burdens and dread of worse. Sometimes fear puts the soul into a ferment as much as sorrow does, and those must needs feel themselves very easy to whom God has given rest from both. Those who are freed from the bondage of sin have a foundation laid for true rest from sorrow and fear.

4 That thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say, How hath the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased! 5 The LORD hath broken the staff of the wicked, and the sceptre of the rulers. 6 He who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke, he that ruled the nations in anger, is persecuted, and none hindereth. 7 The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet: they break forth into singing. 8 Yea, the fir-trees rejoice at thee, and the cedars of Lebanon, saying, Since thou art laid down, no feller is come up against us. 9 Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. 10 All they shall speak and say unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we? Art thou become like unto us? 11 Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee. 12 How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! 13 For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: 14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High. 15 Yet

thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. 16 They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; 17 That made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners? 18 All the kings of the nations, even all of them, lie in glory, every one in his own house. 19 But thou art cast out of thy grave like an abominable branch, and as the raiment of those that are slain, thrust through with a sword, that go down to the stones of the pit; as a carcase trodden under feet. 20 Thou shalt not be joined with them in burial, because thou hast destroyed thy land, and slain thy people: the seed of evil doers shall never be renowned. 21 Prepare slaughter for his children for the iniquity of their fathers; that they do not rise, nor possess the land, nor fill the face of the world with cities. 22 For I will rise up against them, saith the LORD of hosts, and cut off from Babylon the name, and remnant, and son, and nephew, saith the LORD. 23 I will also make it a possession for the bittern, and pools of water: and I will sweep it with the besom of destruction, saith the LORD of hosts.

The kings of Babylon, successively, were the great enemies and oppressors of God's people, and therefore the destruction of Babylon, the fall of the king, and the ruin of his family, are here particularly taken notice of and triumphed in. In the day that God has given Israel rest they shall take up this proverb against the king of Babylon. We must not rejoice when our enemy falls, as ours; but when Babylon, the common enemy of God and his Israel, sinks, then rejoice over her, thou heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, Rev. xviii. 20. The Babylonian monarchy bade fair to be an absolute, universal, and perpetual one, and, in these pretensions, vied with the Almighty; it is therefore very justly, not only brought down, but insulted over when it is down; and it is not only the last monarch, Belshazzar, who was slain on that night that Babylon was taken (Dan. v. 30), who is here triumphed over, but the whole monarchy, which sunk in him; not without special reference to Nebuchadnezzar, in whom that monarchy was at its height. Now here,

I. The fall of the king of Babylon is rejoiced in; and a most curious and elegant composition is here prepared, not to adorn his hearse or monument, but to expose his memory and fix a lasting brand of infamy upon it. It gives us an account of the life and death of this mighty monarch, how he *went down slain to the pit*, though he had been *the terror of the mighty in the land of the living*, Ezek. xxxii. 27. In this parable we may observe,

1. The prodigious height of wealth and power at which this monarch and monarchy arrived. Babylon was a *golden city*, v. 4 (it is a Chaldee word in the original, which intimates that she used to call herself so), so much did she abound in riches and excel all other cities, as gold does all other metals. She is *gold-thirsty*, or an exactress of gold (so some read it); for how do men get wealth to themselves but by squeezing it out of others? The New Jerusalem is the only truly golden city, Rev. xxi. 18, 21. The king of Babylon, having so much wealth in his dominions and the absolute command of it, by the help of that *ruled the nations* (v. 6), gave them law, read them their doom, and at his pleasure *weakened the nations* (v. 12), that they might not be able to make head against him. Such vast and victorious armies did he bring into the field, that, which way soever he looked, he *made the earth to tremble, and shook kingdoms* (v. 16); all his neighbours were afraid of him, and were forced to submit to him. No one man could do this by his own personal strength, but by the numbers he has at his beck. Great tyrants, by making some do what they will, make others suffer what they will. How piteous is the case of mankind, which thus seems to be in a combination against itself, and its own rights and liberties, which could not be ruined but by its own strength!

2. The wretched abuse of all this wealth and power, which the king of Babylon was guilty of, in two instances:—

(1.) Great oppression and cruelty. He is known by the name of the *oppressor* (v. 4); he has *the sceptre of the rulers* (v. 5), has the command of all the princes about him; but it is *the staff of the wicked*, a staff with which he supports himself in his wickedness and wickedly strikes all about him. He *smote the people*, not in justice, for their correction and reformation, but *in wrath* (v. 6), to gratify his own peevish resentments, and that *with a continual stroke*, pursued them with his forces, and gave them no respite, no breathing time, no cessation of arms. He ruled the nations, but he ruled them *in anger*, every thing he said and did was in a passion; so that he who had the government of all about him had no government of himself. He *made the world as a wilderness*, as if he had taken a pride in being the plague of his generation and a curse to mankind, v. 17. Great

princes usually glory in building cities, but he gloried in destroying them; see Ps. ix. 6. Two particular instances, worse than all the rest, are here given of his tyranny:— [1.] That he was severe to his captives (v. 17): He *opened not the house of his prisoners*; he *did not let them loose homeward* (so the margin reads it); he kept them in close confinement, and never would suffer any to return to their own land. This refers especially to the people of the Jews, and it is that which fills up the measure of the king of Babylon's iniquity, that he had detained the people of God in captivity and would by no means release them; nay, and by profaning the vessels of God's temple at Jerusalem, did in effect say that they should never return to their former use, Dan. v. 3. For this he was quickly and justly turned out by one whose first act was to open the house of God's prisoners and send home the temple vessels. [2.] That he was oppressive to his own subjects (v. 20): *Thou hast destroyed thy land, and slain thy people*; and what did he get by that, when the wealth of the land and the multitude of the people are the strength and honour of the prince, who never rules so safely, so gloriously, as in the hearts and affections of the people? But tyrants sacrifice their interests to their lusts and passions; and God will reckon with them for their barbarous usage of those who are under their power, whom they think they may use as they please.

(2.) Great pride and haughtiness. Notice is here taken of his *pomp*, the extravagancy of his retinue, v. 11. He affected to appear in the utmost magnificence. But that was not the worst: it was the temper of his mind, and the elevation of that, that ripened him for ruin (v. 13, 14): *Thou hast said in thy heart, like Lucifer, I will ascend into heaven*. Here is the language of his vain-glory, borrowed perhaps from that of the angels who fell, who not content with their first estate, the post assigned them, would vie with God, and become not only independent of him, but equal with him. Or perhaps it refers to the story of Nebuchadnezzar, who, when he would be more than a man, was justly turned into a brute, Dan. iv. 30. The king of Babylon here promises himself, [1.] That in pomp and power he shall surpass all his neighbours, and shall arrive at the very height of earthly glory and felicity, that he shall be as great and happy as this world can make him; that is the heaven of a carnal heart, and to that he hopes to ascend, and to be as far above those about him as the heaven is above the earth. Princes are the stars of God, which give some light to this dark world (Matt. xxiv. 29); but he will exalt his throne above them all. [2.] That he shall particularly insult over God's Mount Zion, which Belshazzar, in his last drunken frolic, seems to have had a particular spite against when



he called for the vessels of the temple at Jerusalem, to profane them; see Dan. v. 2. In the same humour he here said, *I will sit upon the mount of the congregation* (it is the same word that is used for the holy convocations), *in the sides of the north*; so Mount Zion is said to be situated, Ps. xlviii. 2. Perhaps Belshazzar was projecting an expedition to Jerusalem, to triumph in the ruins of it, at the time when God cut him off. [3.] That he shall vie with the God of Israel, of whom he had indeed heard glorious things, that he had his residence *above the heights of the clouds*. "But thither," says he, "*will I ascend*, and be as great as he; I will be like him whom they call *the Most High*." It is a gracious ambition to covet to be like the Most Holy, for he has said, *Be you holy, for I am holy*; but it is a sinful ambition to aim to be like the Most High, for he has said, *He that exalteth himself shall be abased*, and the devil drew our first parents in to eat forbidden fruit by promising them that they should be as gods. [4.] That he shall himself be deified after his death, as some of the first founders of the Assyrian monarchy were, and stars had even their names from them. "But," says he, "*I will exalt my throne above them all*." Such as this was his pride, which was the undoubted omen of his destruction.

3. The utter ruin that should be brought upon him. It is foretold, (1.) That his wealth and power should be broken, and a final period put to his pomp and pleasure. He has been long an oppressor, but he shall cease to be so, v. 4. Had he ceased to be so by true repentance and reformation, according to the advice Daniel gave to Nebuchadnezzar, it might have been a lengthening of his life and tranquillity. But those that will not cease to sin God will make to cease. "*The golden city, which one would have thought might continue for ever, has ceased*; there is an end of that Babylon. *The Lord, the righteous God, has broken the staff of that wicked prince*, broken it over his head, in token of the divesting him of his office. God has taken his power from him, and rendered him incapable of doing any more mischief: he has broken the sceptres; for even these are brittle things, soon broken and often justly." (2.) That he himself should be seized: *He is persecuted* (v. 6); violent hands are laid upon him, and none hinders. It is the common fate of tyrants, when they fall into the power of their enemies, to be deserted by their flatterers, whom they took for their friends. We read of another enemy like this, of whom it is foretold that *he shall come to his end and none shall help him*, Dan. xi. 45. Tiberius and Nero thus saw themselves abandoned. (3.) That he should be slain, and go down to the congregation of the dead, to be free among them, as the slain that are no more remembered, Ps. lxxxviii. 5. He shall be

weak as the dead are, and like unto them, v. 10. His pomp is brought down to the grave (v. 11), that is, it perishes with him; the pomp of his life shall not, as usual, end in a funeral pomp. True glory (that is, true grace) will go up with the soul to heaven, but vain pomp will go down with the body to the grave: there is an end of it. *The noise of his viols is now heard no more*. Death is a farewell to the pleasures, as well as to the pomps, of this world. This mighty prince, that used to lie on a bed of down, to tread upon rich carpets, and to have coverings and canopies exquisitely fine, now shall have the worms spread under him and the worms covering him, worms bred out of his own putrefied body, which, though he fancied himself a god, proved him to be made of the same mould with other men. When we are pampering and decking our bodies it is good to remember they will be worms'-meat shortly. (4.) That he should not have the honour of a burial, much less of a decent one and in the sepulchres of his ancestors. *The kings of the nations lie in glory* (v. 18), either their dead bodies themselves so embalmed as to be preserved from putrefaction, as of old among the Egyptians, or their effigies (as with us) erected over their graves. Thus, as if they would defy the ignominy of death, they lay in a poor faint sort of glory, *every one in his own house*, that is, his own burying-place (for the grave is the house appointed for all living), a sleeping house, where the busy and troublesome will lie quiet and the troubled and weary lie at rest. But this king of Babylon is cast out and has no grave (v. 19); his dead body is thrown, like that of a beast, into the next ditch or upon the next dunghill, *like an abominable branch* of some noxious poisonous plant, which nobody will touch, or as the clothes of malefactors put to death and by the hand of justice thrust through with a sword, on whose dead bodies heaps of stones are raised, or they are thrown into some deep quarry among the stones of the pit. Nay, the king of Babylon's dead body shall be as the carcases of those who are slain in a battle, which are trodden under feet by the horses and soldiers and crushed to pieces. Thus he shall not be joined with his ancestors in burial, v. 20. To be denied decent burial is a disgrace, which, if it be inflicted for righteousness' sake (as Ps. lxxix. 2), may, as other similar reproaches, be rejoiced in (Matt. v. 12); it is the lot of the two witnesses, Rev. xi. 9. But if, as here, it be the just punishment of iniquity, it is an intimation that evil pursues impenitent sinners beyond death, greater evil than that, and that they shall rise to everlasting shame and contempt.

4. The many triumphs that should be in his fall.

(1.) Those whom he had been a great tyrant and terror to will be glad that they

are rid of him, v. 7, 8. Now that he is gone *the whole earth is at rest and is quiet*, for he was the great disturber of the peace; now they all *break forth into singing*, for *when the wicked perish there is shouting* (Prov. xi. 10); the fir-trees and cedars of Lebanon now think themselves safe; there is no danger now of their being cut down, to make way for his vast armies or to furnish him with timber. The neighbouring princes and great men, who are compared to fir-trees and cedars (Zech. xi. 2), may now be easy, and out of fear of being dispossessed of their rights, for *the hammer of the whole earth is cut asunder and broken* (Jer. l. 23), the axe that *boasted itself against him that hewed with it*, ch. x. 15.

(2.) The congregation of the dead will bid him welcome to them, especially those whom he had barbarously hastened thither (v. 9, 10): "*Hell from beneath is moved for thee, to meet thee at thy coming, and to compliment thee upon thy arrival at their dark and dreadful regions.*" *The chief ones of the earth*, who when they were alive were kept in awe by him and durst not come near him, but rose from their thrones, to resign them to him, shall upbraid him with it when he comes into the state of the dead. They shall go forth to meet him, as they used to do when he made his public entry into cities he had become master of; with such a parade shall he be introduced into those regions of horror, to make his disgrace and torment the more grievous to him. They shall scoffingly rise from their thrones and seats there, and ask him if he will please to sit down in them, as he used to do in their thrones on earth? The confusion that will then cover him they shall make a jest of: "*Hast thou also become weak as we? Who would have thought it? It is what thou thyself didst not expect it would ever come to when thou wast in every thing too hard for us. Thou that didst rank thyself among the immortal gods, art thou come to take thy fate among us poor mortal men? Where is thy pomp now, and where thy mirth? How hast thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer! son of the morning!*" v. 11, 12. The king of Babylon shone as brightly as the morning star, and fancied that wherever he came he brought day along with him; and has such an illustrious prince as this fallen, such a star become a clod of clay? Did ever any man fall from such a height of honour and power into such an abyss of shame and misery? This has been commonly alluded to (and it is a mere allusion) to illustrate the fall of the angels, who were as morning stars (Job xxxviii. 7), but *how have they fallen! How art thou cut down to the ground, and levelled with it, that didst weaken the nations!* God will reckon with those that invade the rights and disturb the peace of mankind, for he is King of nations as well as of saints. Now this recep-

tion of the king of Babylon into the regions of the dead, which is here described, surely is something more than a flight of fancy, and is designed to teach these solid truths:—[1.] That there is an invisible world, a world of spirits, to which the souls of men remove at death and in which they exist and act in a state of separation from the body. [2.] That separate souls have acquaintance and converse with each other, though we have none with them: the parable of the rich man and Lazarus intimates this. [3.] That death and hell will be death and hell indeed to those that fall unsanctified from the height of this world's pomps and the fullness of its pleasures. *Son, remember*, Luke xvi. 25.

(3.) Spectators will stand amazed at his fall. When he shall be *brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit*, and be lodged there, *those that see him shall narrowly look upon him, and consider him* (v. 15, 16); they shall scarcely believe their own eyes. "Never was death so great a change to any man as it is to him. Is it possible that a man, who a few hours ago looked so great, so pleasant, and was so splendidly adorned and attended, should now look so ghastly, so despicable, and lie thus naked and neglected? *Is this the man that made the earth to tremble and shook kingdoms?* Who could have thought he should ever come to this?" Ps. lxxxii. 7.

5. Here is an inference drawn from all this (v. 20): *The seed of evil-doers shall never be renowned*. The princes of the Babylonian monarchy were all a seed of evil-doers, oppressors of the people of God, and therefore they had this infamy entailed upon them. *They shall not be renowned for ever* (so some read it); they may look big for a time, but all their pomp will only render their disgrace at last the more shameful. There is no credit in a sinful way.

II. The utter ruin of the royal family is here foretold, together with the desolation of The royal city.

1. The royal family is to be wholly extirpated. The Medes and Persians, that are to be employed in this destroying work, are ordered, when they have slain Belshazzar, to *prepare slaughter for his children* (v. 21) and not to spare them. The little ones of Babylon must be *dashed against the stones*, Ps. cxxxvii. 9. These orders sound very harshly; but, (1.) They must suffer for the *iniquity of their fathers*, which is often visited upon the children, to show how much God hates sin and is displeased at it, and to deter sinners from it, which is the end of punishment. Nebuchadnezzar had slain Zedekiah's sons (Jer. lii. 10), and, for that iniquity of his, his seed are paid in the same coin. (2.) They must be cut off now, that they may not rise up to possess the land and do as much mischief in their day as their fathers had done in theirs—that they may



not be as vexatious to the world by building cities for the support of their tyranny (which was Nimrod's policy, Gen. x. 10, 11) as their ancestors had been by destroying cities. Pharaoh oppressed Israel in Egypt by setting them to build cities, Exod. i. 11. The providence of God consults the welfare of nations more than we are aware of by cutting off some who, if they had lived, would have done mischief. Justly may the enemies cut off the children: *For I will rise up against them, saith the Lord of hosts (v. 22), and if God reveal it as his mind that he will have it done, as none can hinder it, so none need scruple to further it.* Babylon perhaps was proud of the numbers of her royal family, but God had determined to *cut off the name and remnant* of it, so that none should be left, to have both the sons and grandsons of the king slain; and yet we are sure he never did, nor ever will do, any wrong to any of his creatures.

2. The royal city is to be demolished and deserted, v. 23. It shall be a possession for solitary frightful birds, particularly the *bittern*, joined with the cormorant and the owl, ch. xxxiv. 11. And thus the utter destruction of the New-Testament Babylon is illustrated, Rev. xviii. 2. *It has become a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.* Babylon lay low, so that when it was deserted, and no care taken to drain the land, it soon became *pools of water*, standing noisome puddles, as unhealthful as they were unpleasant: and thus God *will sweep it with the besom of destruction*. When a people have nothing among them but dirt and filth, and will not be made clean with the besom of reformation, what can they expect but to be swept off the face of the earth with the besom of destruction?

24 The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand: 25 That I will break the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains tread him under foot: then shall his yoke depart from off them, and his burden depart from off their shoulders. 26 This *is* the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth: and this *is* the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. 27 For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? And his hand *is* stretched out, and who shall turn it back? 28 In the year that king Ahaz died was this burden. 29 Rejoice not thou, whole Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken: for out of the ser-

pent's root shall come forth a cockatrice, and his fruit *shall be* a fiery flying serpent. 30 And the first-born of the poor shall feed, and the needy shall lie down in safety: and I will kill thy root with famine, and he shall slay thy remnant. 31 Howl, O gate; cry, O city; thou, whole Palestina, *art* dissolved: for there shall come from the north a smoke, and none *shall be* alone in his appointed times. 32 What shall one then answer the messengers of the nation? That the LORD hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it.

The destruction of Babylon and the Chaldean empire was a thing at a great distance; the empire had not risen to any considerable height when its fall was here foretold: it was almost 200 years from this prediction of Babylon's fall to the accomplishment of it. Now the people to whom Isaiah prophesied might ask, "What is this to us, or what shall we be the better for it, and what assurance shall we have of it?" To both questions he answers in these verses, by a prediction of the ruin both of the Assyrians and of the Philistines, the present enemies that infested them, which they should shortly be eye-witnesses of and have benefit by. These would be a present comfort to them, and a pledge of future deliverance, for the confirming of the faith of their posterity. God is to his people the same to day that he was yesterday and will be hereafter; and he will for ever be the same that he has been and is. Here is,

I. Assurance given of the destruction of the Assyrians (v. 25): *I will break the Assyrian in my land.* Sennacherib brought a very formidable army into the land of Judah, but there God broke it, broke all his regiments by the sword of a destroying angel. Note, Those who wrongfully invade God's land shall find that it is at their peril: and those who with unhallowed feet trample upon his holy mountains shall themselves there be trodden under foot. God undertakes to do this himself, his people having no might against the great company that came against them: "*I will break the Assyrian*"; let me alone to do it who have angels, hosts of angels, at command." Now the breaking of the power of the Assyrian would be the breaking of the yoke from off the neck of God's people: *His burden shall depart from off their shoulders*, the burden of quartering that vast army and paying contribution; therefore the Assyrian must be broken, that Judah and Jerusalem may be eased. Let those that make themselves a yoke and a burden to God's people see

what they are to expect. Now, 1. This prophecy is here ratified and confirmed by an oath (v. 24): *The Lord of hosts hath sworn*, that he might show the immutability of his counsel, and that his people may have strong consolation, Heb. vi. 17, 18. What is here said of this particular intention is true of all God's purposes: *As I have thought, so shall it come to pass; for he is in one mind, and who can turn him?* Nor is he ever put upon new counsels, or obliged to take new measures, as men often are when things occur which they did not foresee. Let those who are *called according to God's purpose* comfort themselves with this, that, *as God has purposed, so shall it stand*, and on that their stability depends. 2. The breaking of the Assyrian power is made a specimen of what God would do with all the powers of the nations that were engaged against him and his church (v. 26): *This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth (the whole world, so the LXX.), all the inhabitants of the earth (so the Chaldee), not only upon the Assyrian empire (which was then reckoned to be in a manner all the world, as afterwards the Roman empire was (Luke ii. 1) and with it many nations fell that had dependence upon it), but upon all those states and potentates that should at any time attack his land, his mountains. The fate of the Assyrian shall be theirs; they shall soon find that they meddle to their own hurt. Jerusalem, as it was to the Assyrians, will be to all people a burdensome stone; all that burden themselves with it shall infallibly be cut to pieces by it, Zech. xii. 3, 6. The same hand of power and justice that is now to be stretched out against the Assyrian for invading the people of God shall be stretched out upon all the nations that do likewise. It is still true, and will ever be so, Cursed is he that curses God's Israel, Num. xxiv. 9. God will be an enemy to his people's enemies, Exod. xxiii. 22. 3. All the powers on earth are defied to change God's counsel (v. 27): "The Lord of hosts has purposed to break the Assyrian's yoke, and every rod of the wicked laid upon the lot of the righteous; and who shall disannul this purpose? Who can persuade him to recal it, or find out a plea to evade it? His hand is stretched out to execute this purpose; and who has power enough to turn it back or to stay the course of his judgments?"*

II. Assurance is likewise given of the destruction of the Philistines and their power. This burden, this prophecy, that lay as a load upon them, to sink their state, came in the year that king Ahaz died, which was the first year of Hezekiah's reign, v. 28. When a good king came in the room of a bad one then this acceptable message was sent among them. When we reform, then, and not till then, we may look for good news from heaven. Now here we have, 1. A rebuke to the Philistines for triumphing in the death of

king Uzziah. He had been as a serpent to them (v. 29), had bitten them, had smitten them, had brought them very low, 2 Chron. xxvi. 6. He *warred against the Philistines, broke down their walls, and built cities among them*. But when Uzziah died, or rather abdicated, it was told with joy in Gath and published in the streets of Ashkelon. It is inhuman thus to rejoice in our neighbour's fall. But let them not be secure; for though when Uzziah was dead they made reprisals upon Ahaz, and took many of the cities of Judah (2 Chron. xxviii. 18), yet *out of the root of Uzziah should come a cockatrice*, a more formidable enemy than Uzziah was, even Hezekiah, the fruit of whose government should be to them a *fiery flying serpent*, for he should fall upon them with incredible swiftness and fury: we find he did so. 2 Kings xviii. 8, *He smote the Philistines even to Gaza*. Note, If God remove one useful instrument in the midst of his usefulness, he can, and will, raise up others to carry on and complete the same work that they were employed in and left unfinished. 2. A prophecy of the destruction of the Philistines by famine and war. (1.) By famine, v. 30. "When the people of God, whom the Philistines had wasted, and distressed, and impoverished, shall enjoy plenty again, and the first-born of their poor shall feed (the poorest among them shall have food convenient), then, as for the Philistines, God will kill their root with famine. That which was their strength, and with which they thought themselves established as the tree is by the root, shall be starved and dried up by degrees, as those die that die by famine; and thus he shall slay the remnant: those that escape from one destruction are but reserved for another; and, when there are but a few left, those few shall at length be cut off, for God will make a full end. (2.) By war. When the needy of God's people shall lie down in safety, not terrified with the alarms of war, but delighting in the songs of peace, then every gate and every city of the Philistines shall be howling and crying (v. 31), and there shall be a total dissolution of their state; for from Judea, which lay north of the Philistines, there shall come a smoke (a vast army raising a great dust, a smoke that shall be the indication of a devouring fire at hand), and none of all that army shall be alone in his appointed times; none shall straggle or be missing when they are to engage; but they shall all be vigorous and unanimous in attacking the common enemy, when the time appointed for the doing of it comes. None of them shall decline the public service, as, in Deborah's time, Reuben abode among the sheepfolds and Asher on the sea-shore, Judg. v. 16, 17. When God has work to do he will wonderfully endow and dispose men for it.

III. The good use that should be made of all these events for the encouragement of



the people of God (v. 32) : *What shall one then answer the messengers of the nations ?*

1. This implies, (1.) That the great things God does for his people are, and cannot but be, taken notice of by their neighbours ; those among the heathen make remarks upon them, Ps. cxxvi. 2. (2.) That messengers will be sent to enquire concerning them. Jacob and Israel had long been a people distinguished from all others and dignified with uncommon favours ; and therefore some for good-will, others for ill-will, and all for curiosity, are inquisitive concerning them. (3.) That it concerns us always to be ready to give a reason of the hope that we have in the providence of God, as well as in his grace, in answer to every one that asks it, *with meekness and fear*, 1 Pet. iii. 15. And we need go no further than the sacred truths of God's word for a reason ; for God, in all he does, is fulfilling the scripture. (4.) The issue of God's dealings with his people shall be so clearly and manifestly glorious that any one, every one, shall be able to give an account of them to those that enquire concerning them. Now,

2. The answer which is to be given to the messengers of the nations is, (1.) That God is and will be a faithful friend to his church and people, and will secure and advance their interests. Tell them that *the Lord has founded Zion*. This gives an account both of the work itself that is done and of the reason of it. What is God doing in the world, and what is he designing in all the revolutions of states and kingdoms, in the ruin of some nations and the rise of others ? He is, in all this, founding Zion ; he is aiming at the advancement of his church's interests ; and what he aims at he will accomplish. The messengers of the nations, when they sent to enquire concerning Hezekiah's successes against the Philistines, expected to learn by what politics, counsels, and arts of war he carried his point ; but they are told that these successes were not owing to any thing of that nature, but to the care God took of his church and the interest he had in it. The Lord has founded Zion, and therefore the Philistines must fall. (2.) That his church has and will have a dependence upon him : *The poor of his people shall trust in it*, his poor people who have lately been brought very low, even the poorest of them ; they more than others, for they have nothing else to trust to, Zeph. iii. 12, 13. *The poor receive the gospel*, Matt. xi. 5. They shall trust to this, to this great truth, that the Lord has founded Zion ; on this they shall build their hopes, and not on an arm of flesh. This ought to give us abundant satisfaction as to public affairs, that however it may go with particular persons, parties, and interests, the church, having God himself for its founder and Christ the rock for its foundation, cannot but stand firm. *The poor of his people shall betake themselves to it* (so

some read it), shall join themselves to his church and embark in its interests ; they shall concur with God in his designs to establish his people, and shall wind up all on the same plan, and make all their little concerns and projects bend to that. Those that take God's people for their people must be willing to take their lot with them and cast in their lot among them. Let the messengers of the nations know that the poor Israelites, who trust in God, having, like Zion, their foundation in the holy mountains (Ps. lxxxvii. 1), are like Zion, which *cannot be removed, but abides for ever* (Ps. cxxv. 1.), and therefore they will not fear what man can do unto them.

#### CHAP. XV.

This chapter, and that which follows it, are the burden of Moab—a prophecy of some great desolation that was coming upon that country, which bordered upon this land of Israel, and had often been injurious and vexatious to it, though the Moabites were descended from Lot, Abraham's kinsman and companion, and though the Israelites, by the appointment of God, had spared them when they might both easily and justly have cut them off with their neighbours. In this chapter we have, I. Great lamentation made by the Moabites, and by the prophet himself for them, ver. 1—5. II. The great calamities which should occasion that lamentation and justify it, ver. 6—9.

**T**HE burden of Moab. Because in the night Ar of Moab is laid waste, *and* brought to silence ; because in the night Kir of Moab is laid waste, *and* brought to silence ; 2 He is gone to Bajith, and to Dibon, the high places, to weep : Moab shall howl over Nebo, and over Medeba : on all their heads *shall be* baldness, *and* every beard cut off. 3 In their streets they shall gird themselves with sackcloth : on the tops of their houses, and in their streets, every one shall howl, weeping abundantly. 4 And Heshbon shall cry, and Elealeh : their voice shall be heard *even* unto Jahaz : therefore the armed soldiers of Moab shall cry out ; his life shall be grievous unto him. 5 My heart shall cry out for Moab ; his fugitives *shall flee* unto Zoar, an heifer of three years old : for by the mounting up of Luhith with weeping shall they go it up ; for in the way of Horonaim they shall raise up a cry of destruction.

The country of Moab was of small extent, but very fruitful. It bordered upon the lot of Reuben on the other side Jordan and upon the Dead Sea. Naomi went to sojourn there when there was a famine in Canaan. This is the country which (it is here foretold) should be wasted and grievously harassed, not quite ruined, for we find another prophecy of its ruin (Jer. xlviii), which was accomplished by Nebuchadnezzar. This prophecy here was to be fulfilled *within*

three years (*ch. xvi. 14*), and therefore was fulfilled in the devastations made of that country by the army of the Assyrians, which for many years ravaged those parts, enriching themselves with spoil and plunder. It was done either by the army of Shalmaneser, about the time of the taking of Samaria, in the fourth year of Hezekiah (as is most probable), or by the army of Sennacherib, which, ten years after, invaded Judah. We cannot suppose that the prophet went among the Moabites to preach to them this sermon; but he delivered it to his own people, 1. To show them that, though judgment begins at the house of God, it shall not end there,—that there is a providence which governs the world and all the nations of it,—and that to the God of Israel the worshippers of false gods were accountable, and liable to his judgments. 2. To give them a proof of God's care of them and jealousy for them, and to convince them that God was an enemy to their enemies, for such the Moabites had often been. 3. That the accomplishment of this prophecy now shortly (*within three years*) might be a confirmation of the prophet's mission and of the truth of all his other prophecies, and might encourage the faithful to depend upon them.

Now concerning Moab it is here foretold,

I. That their chief cities should be surprised and taken in a night by the enemy, probably because the inhabitants, as the men of Laish, indulged themselves in ease and luxury, and dwelt securely (*v. 1*): Therefore there shall be great grief, *because in the night Ar of Moab is laid waste and Kir of Moab*, the two principal cities of that kingdom. *In the night that they were taken, or sacked, Moab was cut off.* The seizing of them laid the whole country open, and made all the wealth of it an easy prey to the victorious army. Note, 1. Great changes and very dismal ones may be made in a very little time. Here are two cities lost in a night, though that is the time of quietness. Let us therefore lie down as those that know not what a night may bring forth. 2. As the country feeds the cities, so the cities protect the country, and neither can say to the other, *I have no need of thee.*

II. That the Moabites, being hereby put into the utmost consternation imaginable, should have recourse to their idols for relief, and pour out their tears before them (*v. 2*): *He* (that is, Moab, especially the king of Moab) *has gone up to Bajith* (or rather to the house or temple of Chemosh), and *Dibon*, the inhabitants of Dibon, *have gone up to the high places*, where they worshipped their idols, there to make their complaints. Note, It becomes a people in distress to seek to their God; and shall not we then thus *walk in the name of the Lord our God*, and call upon him in the time of trouble, before whom we shall not shed such useless profitless tears as they did before their gods?

III. That there should be the voice of universal grief all the country over. It is described here elegantly and very affectingly. Moab shall be a vale of tears—a little map of this world, *v. 2*. The Moabites shall lament the loss of Nebo and Medeba, two considerable cities, which, it is likely, were plundered and burnt. They shall tear their hair for grief to such a degree that *on all their heads shall be baldness, and they shall cut off their beards*, according to the customary expressions of mourning in those times and countries. When they go abroad they shall be so far from coveting to appear handsome that *in the streets they shall gird themselves with sackcloth* (*v. 3*), and perhaps being forced to use that poor clothing, the enemy having stripped them, and rifled their houses, and left them no other clothing. When they come home, instead of applying themselves to their business, they shall go up to the *tops of their houses* which were flat-roofed, and there they shall *weep abundantly*, nay, they shall *howl*, in crying to their gods. Those that *cry not to God with their hearts* do but *howl upon their beds*, *Hos. vii. 14*; *Amos viii. 3*. *They shall come down with weeping* (so the margin reads it); they shall come down from their high places and the tops of their houses weeping as much as they did when they went up. Prayer to the true God is heart's ease (*1 Sam. i. 18*), but prayers to false gods are not. Divers places are here named that should be full of lamentation (*v. 4*), and it is but a poor relief to have so many fellow-sufferers, fellow-mourners; to a public spirit it is rather an aggravation *socios habuisse doloris—to have associates in woe.*

IV. That the courage of their militia should fail them. Though they were bred soldiers, and were well armed, yet they *shall cry out* and shriek for fear, and every one of them shall have *his life become grievous to him*, though it is characteristic of a military life to delight in danger, *v. 4*. See how easily God can dispirit the stoutest of men, and deprive a nation of benefit by those whom it most depended upon for strength and defence. The Moabites shall generally be so overwhelmed with grief that life itself shall be a burden to them. God can easily make weary of life those that are fondest of it.

V. That the outcry for these calamities should propagate grief to all the adjacent parts, *v. 5*. 1. The prophet himself has very sensible impressions made upon his spirit by the prediction of it: *"My heart shall cry out for Moab"*; though they are enemies to Israel, they are our fellow-creatures, of the same rank with us, and therefore it should grieve us to see them in such distress, the rather because we know not how soon it may be our own turn to drink of the same cup of trembling." Note, It becomes God's ministers to be of a tender spirit, not to desire the woeful day, but to be like their master, who wept over Jerusalem even when he gave her



up to ruin, like their God, *who desires not the death of sinners*. 2. All the neighbouring cities shall echo to the lamentations of Moab. *The fugitives*, who are making the best of their way to shift for their own safety, shall carry the cry to Zoar, the city to which their ancestor Lot fled for shelter from Sodom's flames and which was spared for his sake. They shall make as great a noise with their cry as a heifer of three years old does when she goes lowing for her calf, as 1 Sam. vi. 12. They shall go up the hill of Luhith (as David went up the ascent of Mount Olivet, many a weary step and all in tears, 2 Sam. xv. 30), and in the way of Horonaim (a dual termination), the way that leads to the two Beth-horons, the upper and the nether, which we read of, Josh. xvi. 3, 5. Thither the cry shall be carried, there it shall be raised, even at that great distance: *A cry of destruction*; that shall be the cry, like, "Fire, fire! we are all undone." Grief is catching, so is fear, and justly, for trouble is spreading and when it begins who knows where it will end?

6 For the waters of Nimrim shall be desolate: for the hay is withered away, the grass faileth, there is no green thing. 7 Therefore the abundance they have gotten, and that which they have laid up, shall they carry away to the brook of the wil-lows. 8 For the cry is gone round about the borders of Moab; the howling thereof unto Eglaim, and the howling thereof unto Beer-elim. 9 For the waters of Dimon shall be full of blood: for I will bring more upon Dimon, lions upon him that escapeth of Moab, and upon the remnant of the land.

Here the prophet further describes the woeful and piteous lamentations that should be heard throughout all the country of Moab when it should become a prey to the Assyrian army. "By this time the cry has gone round about all the borders of Moab, v. 8. Every corner of the country has received the alarm, and is in the utmost confusion upon it. It has reached to Eglaim, a city at one end of the country, and to Beer-elim, a city as far the other way. Where sin has been general, and all flesh have corrupted their way, what can be expected but a general desolation? Two things are here spoken of as causes of this lamentation:—

I. *The waters of Nimrim are desolate* (v. 6), that is, the country is plundered and impoverished, and all the wealth and substance of it swept away by the victorious army. Famine is usually the sad effect of war. Look into the fields that were well watered, the fruitful meadows that yielded delightful

prospects and more delightful products, and there all is eaten up, or carried off by the enemy's foragers, and the remainder trodden to dirt by their horses. If an army encamp upon green fields, their greenness is soon gone. Look into the houses, and they are stripped too (v. 7): *The abundance of wealth that they had gotten with a great deal of art and industry, and that which they had laid up with a great deal of care and confidence, shall they carry away to the brook of the wil-lows*. Either the owners shall carry it thither to hide it or the enemies shall carry it thither to pack it up and send it home, by water perhaps, to their own country. Note, 1. Those that are eager to get abundance of this world, and solicitous to lay up what they have gotten, little consider what may become of it and in how short a time it may be all taken from them. Great abundance, by tempting the robbers, exposes the owners; and those who depend upon it to protect them often find it does but betray them. 2. In times of distress great riches are often great burdens, and do but increase the owner's care or the enemies' strength. *Cantabit vacuus coram latrone viator—The penniless traveller will exult, when accosted by a robber, in having nothing about him*.

II. *The waters of Dimon are turned into blood* (v. 9), that is, the inhabitants of the country are slain in great numbers, so that the waters adjoining to the cities, whether rivers or pools, are discoloured with human gore, inhumanly shed like water. Dimon signifies bloody; the place shall answer to its name. Perhaps it was that place in the country of Moab where the waters seemed to the Moabites as blood (2 Kings iii. 22, 23), which occasioned their overthrow. But now, says God, *I will bring more upon Dimon*, more blood than was shed, or thought to be seen, at that time. *I will bring additions upon Dimon* (so the word is), additional plagues; I have yet more judgments in reserve for them. *For all this, God's anger is not turned away*. When he judges he will overcome; and to the roll of curses shall be added many like words, Jer. xxxvi. 32. See here what is the yet more evil to be brought upon Dimon, upon Moab, which is now to be made a land of blood. Some flee, and make their escape, others sit still, and are overlooked, and are as a remnant of the land; but upon both God will bring lions, beasts of prey (which are reckoned one of God's four judgments, Ezek. xiv. 21), and these shall glean up those that have escaped the sword of the enemy. Those that continue impenitent in sin, when they are preserved from one judgment, are but reserved for another.

#### CHAP. XVI.

This chapter continues and concludes the burden of Moab. In it, 1. The prophet gives good counsel to the Moabites, to reform what was amiss among them, and particularly to be kind to God's people, as the likeliest way to prevent the judgments before threatened, ver. 1—5. II. Fearing they would not take this counsel (they

were so proud, he goes on to foretell the lamentable devastation of their country, and the confusion they should be brought to, and this within three years, ver. 6-14.

**S**END ye the lamb to the ruler of the land from Sela to the wilderness, unto the mount of the daughter of Zion. 2 For it shall be, *that*, as a wandering bird cast out of the nest, so the daughters of Moab shall be at the fords of Arnon. 3 Take counsel, execute judgment; make thy shadow as the night in the midst of the noon-day; hide the outcasts; bewray not him that wandereth. 4 Let mine outcasts dwell with thee, Moab; be thou a covert to them from the face of the spoiler: for the extortioner is at an end, the spoiler ceaseth, the oppressors are consumed out of the land. 5 And in mercy shall the throne be established: and he shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David, judging, and seeking judgment, and hastening righteousness.

God has made it to appear that he delights not in the ruin of sinners by telling them what they may do to prevent the ruin; so he does here to Moab.

I. He advises them to be just to the house of David, and to pay the tribute they had formerly covenanted to pay to the kings of his line (v. 1): *Send you the lamb to the ruler of the land*. David made the Moabites tributaries to him, 2 Sam. viii. 2. *They became his servants, and brought gifts*. Afterwards they paid their tribute to the kings of Israel (2 Kings iii. 4), and paid it in lambs. Now the prophet requires them to pay it to Hezekiah. Let it be raised and levied from all parts of the country, *from Sela*, a frontier city of Moab on the one side, *to the wilderness*, a boundary of the kingdom on the other side: and let it be sent, where it should be sent, *to the mount of the daughter of Zion*, the city of David. Some take it as an advice to send a lamb for a sacrifice to God, *the ruler of the earth* (so it may be read), the Lord of the whole earth, ruler of all lands, the land of Moab as well as the land of Israel. "Send it to the temple built on Mount Zion." And some think it is in this sense spoken ironically, upbraiding the Moabites with their folly in delaying to repent and make their peace with God. "Now you would be glad to send a lamb to Mount Zion, to make the God of Israel your friend; but it is too late: the decree has gone forth, the consumption is determined, and the *daughters of Moab shall be cast out as a wandering bird*," v. 2. I rather take it as good advice seriously given, like that of Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar when he was reading him his

doom, Dan. iv. 27. *Break off thy sins by righteousness, if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity*. And it is applicable to the great gospel duty of submission to Christ, as the ruler of the land, and our ruler: "Send him the lamb, the best you have, yourselves a living sacrifice. When you come to God, the great ruler, come in the name of the Lamb, the Lamb of God. *For else it shall be*" (so we may read it) "*that, as a wandering bird cast out of the nest, so shall the daughters of Moab be*. If you will not pay your quit-rent, your just tribute to the king of Judah, you shall be turned out of your houses: *The daughters of Moab* (the country villages, or the women of your country) shall flutter about the *fords of Arnon*, attempting that way to make their escape to some other land, *like a wandering bird thrown out of the nest half-fledged*." Those that will not submit to Christ, nor be gathered under the shadow of his wings, shall be *as a bird that wanders from her nest*, that shall either be snatched up by the next bird of prey or shall wander endlessly in continual frights. Those that will not yield to the fear of God shall be made to yield to the fear of every thing else.

II. He advises them to be *kind to the seed of Israel* (v. 3): "Take counsel, call a convention, and consult among yourselves what is fit to be done in the present critical juncture; and you will find it your best way to execute judgment, to reverse all the unrighteous decrees you have made, by which you have put hardships upon the people of God, and, in token of your repentance for them, study now how to oblige them, and this shall be accepted of God more than all burnt-offering and sacrifice."

1. The prophet foresaw some storm coming upon the people of God, perhaps the good people of the ten tribes, or of the two and a half on the other side Jordan, whose country joined to that of Moab, and who, by the merciful providence of God, escaped the fury of the Assyrian army, had their lives given them for a prey, and were reserved for better times, but were put to the utmost extremity to shift for their own safety. The danger and trouble they were in were like the scorching heat at noon; the face of the spoiler was very fierce upon them and the oppressor and extortioner were ready to swallow them up after stripping them of what they had.

2. He bespeaks a shelter for them in the land of Moab, when their own land was made too hot for them. This judgment they must execute; thus wisely must they do for themselves, and thus kindly must they deal with the people of God. If they would themselves continue in their habitations, let them now open their doors to the distressed dispersed members of God's church, and be to them like a cool shade to those that *bear the burden and heat of the day*. Let them not discover those that absconded among them, nor de-



liver them up to the pursuers that made search for them. "*Betray not him that wandereth, nor deliver him up*" (as the Edomites did, Obad. 13, 14), "*but hide the outcasts.*" This was that good work by which Rahab's faith was justified, and proved to be sincere, Heb. xi. 31. "Nay, do not only hide them for a time, but, if there be occasion, let them be naturalized: *Let my outcasts dwell with thee, Moab* (v. 4); find a lodging for them and *be thou a covert to them.* Let them be taken under the protection of the government, though they are but poor, and likely to be a charge to thee." Note, (1.) It is often the lot even of those who are Israelites indeed to be outcasts, driven out of house and harbour by persecution or war, Heb. xi. 37. (2.) God owns them when men reject and disown them. They are *outcasts*, but they are *my outcasts*. The Lord knows those that are his wherever he finds them, even where no one else knows them. (3.) God will find a rest and shelter for his outcasts; for, though they are persecuted, they are not forsaken. He will himself be their dwelling-place if they have no other, and in him they shall be at home. (4.) God can, when he pleases, raise up friends for his people even among Moabites, when they can find none in all the land of Israel that can and dare shelter them. The earth often helps the woman, Rev. xii. 16. (5.) Those that expect to find favour when they are in trouble themselves must show favour to those that are in trouble; and what service is done to God's outcasts shall no doubt be recompensed one way or other.

3. He assures them of the mercy God had in store for his people. (1.) That they should not long need their kindness, or be troublesome to them: *For the extortioner is almost at an end already, and the spoiler ceases.* God's people shall not be long outcasts; they shall have tribulation ten days (Rev. ii. 10), and that is all. The spoiler would never cease spoiling if he might have his will; but God has him in a chain. *Hitherto he shall go, but no further.* (2.) That they should, ere long, be in a capacity to return their kindness (v. 5): "*Though the throne of the ten tribes he sunk and overturned, yet the throne of David shall be established in mercy,* by the mercy they receive from God and the mercy they show to others; and by the same methods may your throne be established if you please." It would engage great men to be kind to the people of God if they would but observe, as they easily might, how often such conduct brings the blessing of God upon kingdoms and families. "Make Hezekiah your friend, for you will find it your interest to do so upon the account both of the grace of God in him and the presence of God with him. *He shall sit upon the throne in truth,* and then he does indeed sit in honour and sit firmly. Then he shall sit

judging, and will then be a protector to those that have been a shelter to the people of God." And see in him the character of a good magistrate. [1.] He shall *seek judgment*; that is, he shall seek occasions of doing right to those that are wronged, and shall punish the injurious even before they are complained of: or he shall diligently search into every cause brought before him, that he may find where the right lies. [2.] He shall *hasten righteousness*, and not delay to do justice, nor keep those long waiting that make application to him for the redress of their grievances. Though he seeks judgment, and deliberates upon it, yet he does not, under pretence of deliberation, stay the progress of the streams of justice. Let the Moabites take example by this, and then assure themselves that their state shall be established.

6 We have heard of the pride of Moab; *he is* very proud: *even* of his haughtiness, and his pride, and his wrath: *but* his lies *shall* not be so. 7 Therefore shall Moab howl for Moab, every one shall howl: for the foundations of Kir-hareseth shall ye mourn; surely *they are* stricken. 8 For the fields of Heshbon languish, *and* the vine of Sibmah: the lords of the heathen have broken down the principal plants thereof, they are come *even* unto Jazer, they wandered *through* the wilderness: her branches are stretched out, they are gone over the sea. 9 Therefore I will bewail with the weeping of Jazer the vine of Sibmah: I will water thee with my tears, O Heshbon, and Elealeh: for the shouting for thy summer fruits and for thy harvest is fallen. 10 And gladness is taken away, and joy out of the plentiful field; and in the vineyards there shall be no singing, neither shall there be shouting: the treaders shall tread out no wine in *their* presses; I have made *their vintage* shouting to cease. 11 Wherefore my bowels shall sound like a harp for Moab, and mine inward parts for Kir-harsh. 12 And it shall come to pass, when it is seen that Moab is weary on the high place, that he shall come to his sanctuary to pray; but he shall not prevail. 13 This *is* the word that the LORD hath spoken concerning Moab since that time. 14 But now the LORD

hath spoken, saying, Within three years, as the years of a hireling, and the glory of Moab shall be condemned, with all that great multitude; and the remnant *shall be* very small and feeble.

Here we have, I. The sins with which Moab is charged, v. 6. The prophet seems to check himself for going about to give good counsel to the Moabites, concluding they would not take the advice he gave them. He told them their duty (whether they would hear or whether they would forbear), but despairs of working any good upon them; he would have healed them, but they would not be healed. Those that will not be counselled cannot be helped. Their sins were, 1. Pride. This is most insisted upon; for perhaps there are more precious souls ruined by pride than by any one lust whatsoever. The Moabites were notorious for this: "*We have heard in both ears of the pride of Moab*"; it is what all their neighbours cry out shame upon them for. *He is very proud*; the body of the nation is so, forgetting the baseness of their origin and the brand of infamy fastened upon them by that law of God which forbade a Moabite to enter into the congregation of the Lord forever, Deut. xxiii. 3. We have heard of his *haughtiness and his pride*. It is not the rash and rigid censure of one or two concerning them, but it is the character which all that know them will give of them. They are a proud people, and therefore they will not take good counsel when it is given them. They think themselves too wise to be advised; therefore they will not take example by Hezekiah to do justly and love mercy. They scorn to make him their pattern, for they think themselves able to teach him. They are proud, and therefore will not be subject to God himself nor regard the warnings he gives them. *The wicked, in the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God*. They are proud, and therefore will not entertain and protect God's outcasts; they scorn to have any thing to do with them." But this is not all:—2. "We have heard of his *wrath* too (for those that are very proud are commonly very passionate), particularly his wrath against the people of God, whom therefore he will rather persecute than protect. 3. It is with his *lies* that he gains the gratifications of his pride and his passion; *but his lies shall not be so*; he shall not compass his proud and angry projects as he hoped he should." Some read it, *His haughtiness, his pride, and his wrath, are greater than his strength*. "We know that, if we lay at his mercy, we should find no mercy with him, but he has not power equal to his malice. His pride draws down ruin upon him; for it is the preface to destruction, and he has not strength to ward it off."

II. The sorrows with which Moab is threatened (v. 7): *Therefore shall Moab howl for Moab*. All the inhabitants shall bitterly lament the ruin of their country. They shall complain one to another: *Every, one shall howl* in despair, and not one shall either see any cause or have any heart to encourage his friend. Observe,

1. The causes of this sorrow. (1.) The destruction of their cities: *For the foundations of Kir-hareseth shall you mourn*. That great and strong city, which had held out against a mighty force (2 Kings iii. 25), should now be levelled with the ground, either burnt or broken down, and its foundations *stricken*, bruised and broken (so the word signifies); they shall howl when they see their splendid cities turned into ruinous heaps. (2.) The desolation of their country. Moab was famous for its fields and vineyards; but those shall all be laid waste by the invading army, v. 8, 10. See, [1.] What a fruitful pleasant country they had, as the garden of the Lord, Gen. xiii. 10. It was planted with choice and noble vines, with *principal plants*, which reached *even to Jazer*, a city in the tribe of Gad. The luxuriant branches of their vines *wandered*, and wound themselves along the ranges on which they were spread, even *through the wilderness* of Moab. There were vineyards there. Nay, they were *stretched out*, and went even to the sea, the Dead Sea: the best grapes grew in their hedge-rows. [2.] How merry and pleasant they had been in it. Many a time they had shouted *for their summer fruits, and for their harvest*, as the country people sometimes do with us when they have cut down all their corn. They had had *joy and gladness* in their fields and vineyards, *singing and shouting at the treading of their grapes*. Nothing is said of their praising God for their abundance, and giving him the glory of it. If they had made it the matter of their thanksgiving, they might still have had it the matter of their rejoicing; but they made it the food and fuel of their lusts; see therefore, [3.] How they should be stripped of all. "*The fields shall languish*, all the fruits of them being carried away or trodden down; they cannot now enrich their owners as they have done, and therefore they languish. The soldiers, called here *the lords of the heathen*, shall break down all the plants, though they were *principal plants*, the choicest that could be got. Now the shouting for the enjoyment of the summer fruits has fallen, and is turned into howling for the loss of them. The joy of harvest has ceased; there is no more singing, no more shouting, for the treading out of wine. They have not what they have had to rejoice in, nor have they a disposition to rejoice; the ruin of their country has marred their mirth." Note, *First*, God can easily change the note of those that are most addicted to mirth and pleasure, can soon turn their



laughter into mourning and their joy into heaviness. *Secondly*, Joy in God is, upon this account, far better than the joy of harvest, that it is what we cannot be robbed of, Ps. iv. 6, 7. Destroy the vines and the fig-trees, and you make all the mirth of a carnal heart to cease, Hos. ii. 11, 12. But a gracious soul can rejoice in the Lord as the God of its salvation even when the fig-tree does not blossom and there is no fruit in the vine, Hab. iii. 17, 18. In God therefore let us always rejoice with a holy triumph, and in other things let us always rejoice with a holy trembling, rejoice as though we rejoiced not.

2. The concurrence of the prophet with them in this sorrow: "*I will with weeping bewail Jazer, and the vine of Sibmah, and look with a compassionate concern upon the desolations of such a pleasant country. I will water thee with my tears, O Heshbon! and mingle them with thy tears;*" nay (v. 11), it appears to be an inward grief: *My bowels shall sound like a harp for Moab*; it should make such an impression upon him that he should feel an inward trembling, like that of the strings of a harp when it is played upon. It well becomes God's prophets to acquaint themselves with grief; the great prophet did so. The afflictions of the world, as well as those of the church, should be afflictions to us. See *ch. xv. 5*.

III. In the close of the chapter we have, 1. The insufficiency of the gods of Moab, the false gods, to help them, v. 12. "Moab shall be soon *weary of the high place*. He shall spend his spirits and strength in vain in praying to his idols; they cannot help him, and he shall be convinced that they cannot." It is seen that it is to no purpose to expect any relief from the high places on earth; it must come from above the hills. Men are generally so stupid that they will not believe, till they are made to see, the vanity of idols and of all creature-confidences, nor will come off from them till they are made weary of them. But, when he is weary of his high places, he will not go, as he should, to God's sanctuary, but to *his* sanctuary, to the temple of Chemosh, the principal idol of Moab (so it is generally understood); and he shall pray there to as little purpose, and as little to his own ease and satisfaction, as he did in his high places; for, whatever honours idolaters give to their idols, they do not thereby make them at all the better able to help them. Whether they are the *dii majorum gentium*—*gods of the higher order*, or *minorum*—*of the lower order*, they are alike the creatures of men's fancy and the work of men's hands. Perhaps it may be meant of their coming to God's sanctuary. When they found they could have no succours from their own high places some of them would come to the temple of God at Jerusalem, to pray there, but in vain; he will justly send

them back to the *gods whom they have served*, Judg. x. 14. 2. The sufficiency of the God of Israel, the only true God, to make good what he had spoken against them. (1.) The thing itself was long since determined (v. 13): *This is the word*, this is the thing, *that the Lord has spoken concerning Moab, since the time that he began to be so proud, and insolent, and abusive to God's people.* The country was long ago doomed to ruin; this was enough to give an assurance of it that *it is the word which the Lord has spoken*; and, as he will never unsay what he has spoken, so all the power of hell and earth cannot gainsay it, or obstruct the execution of it. (2.) Now it was made known when it should be done. The time was before fixed in the counsel of God, but now it was revealed: *The Lord has spoken* that it shall be *within three years*, v. 14. *It is not for us to know, or covet to know, the times and the seasons*, any further than God has thought fit to make them known, and so far we may and must take notice of them. See how God makes known his mind by degrees; the light of divine revelation shone more and more, and so does the light of divine grace in the heart. Observe, [1.] The sentence passed upon Moab: *The glory of Moab shall be contemned*, that is, it shall be contemptible, when all those things they have gloried in shall come to nothing. Such is the glory of this world, so fading and uncertain, admired awhile, but soon slighted. Let that therefore which will soon be contemptible in the eyes of others be always contemptible in our eyes in comparison with the *far more exceeding weight of glory*. It was the glory of Moab that their country was very populous and their forces were courageous; but where is her glory when all that great multitude is in a manner swept away, some by one judgment and some by another, and the little remnant that is left shall be *very small and feeble*, not able to bear up under their own griefs, much less to make head against their enemies' insults? Let not therefore the strong glory in their strength nor the many in their numbers. [2.] The time fixed for the execution of this sentence: *Within three years, as the years of a hireling*, that is, at the three years' end exactly, for a servant that is hired for a certain term keeps account to a day. Let Moab know that her ruin is very near, and prepare accordingly. Fair warning is given, and with it space to repent, which if they had improved, as Nineveh did, we have reason to think the judgments threatened would have been prevented.

## CHAP. XVII.

Syria and Ephraim were confederate against Judah (*ch. vii. 1, 2*), and, they being so closely linked together in their counsels, this chapter, though it be entitled "*the burden of Damascus*" (which was the head city of Syria), reads the doom of Israel too. 1. The destruction of the strong cities both of Syria and Israel is here foretold, ver. 1—5 and again ver. 9—11. 12. In the midst of judgment mercy is remembered to Israel, and a gracious promise made that remnant should be preserved from the calamities and should

get good by them, ver. 6—8. III. The overthrow of the Assyrian army before Jerusalem is pointed at ver. 12—14. In order of time this chapter should be placed next after ch. ix., for the destruction of Damascus, here foretold, happened in the reign of Ahas, 2 Kings xvi. 9.

**T**HE burden of Damascus. Behold, Damascus is taken away from *being* a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap. 2 The cities of Aroer are forsaken: they shall be for flocks, which shall lie down, and none shall make *them* afraid. 3 The fortress also shall cease from Ephraim, and the kingdom from Damascus, and the remnant of Syria: they shall be as the glory of the children of Israel, saith the LORD of hosts. 4 And in that day it shall come to pass, *that* the glory of Jacob shall be made thin, and the fatness of his flesh shall wax lean. 5 And it shall be as when the harvestman gathereth the corn, and reapeth the ears with his arm; and it shall be as he that gathereth ears in the valley of Rephaim.

We have here the burden of Damascus; the Chaldee paraphrase reads it, *The burden of the cup of the curse to drink to Damascus in*; and, the ten tribes being in alliance, they must expect to pledge Damascus in this cup of trembling that is to go round. 1. Damascus itself, the head city of Syria, must be destroyed; the houses, it is likely, will be burnt, at least the walls, and gates, and fortifications demolished, and the inhabitants carried away captive, so that for the present it is *taken away from being a city*, and is reduced not only to a village, but to a *ruinous heap*, v. 1. Such desolating work as this does sin make with cities. 2. The country towns are abandoned by their inhabitants, frightened or forced away by the invaders: *The cities of Aroer* (a province of Syria so called) *are forsaken* (v. 2); the conquered dare not dwell in them, and the conquerors have no occasion for them, nor did they seize them for want, but wantonness; so that the places which should be for men to live in are for *flocks to lie down in*, which they may do, and none will disturb nor dislodge them. Stately houses are converted into sheep-cotes. It is strange that great conquerors should pride themselves in being common enemies to mankind. But, how unrighteous soever they are, God is righteous in causing those cities to spue out their inhabitants, who by their wickedness had made themselves vile; it is better that *flocks should lie down there* than that they should harbour such as are in open rebellion against God and virtue. 3. The strongholds of Israel, the kingdom of the ten tribes, will be brought to ruin:

*The fortress shall cease from Ephraim* (v. 3), that in Samaria, and all the rest. They had joined with Syria in invading Judah very unnaturally; and now those that had been partakers in sin should be made partakers in ruin, and justly. When *the fortress shall cease from Ephraim*, by which Israel will be weakened, the kingdom will cease from Damascus, by which Syria will be ruined. The Syrians were the ring-leaders in that confederacy against Judah, and therefore they are punished first and sorest; and, because they boasted of their alliance with Israel, now that Israel is weakened they are upbraided with those boasts: "*The remnant of Syria shall be as the glory of the children of Israel*"; those few that remain of the Syrians shall be in as mean and despicable a condition as the children of Israel are, and the glory of Israel shall be no relief or reputation to them." Sinful confederacies will be no strength, no stay, to the confederates, when God's judgments come upon them. See here what the glory of Jacob is when God contends with him, and what little reason Syria will have to be proud of resembling the glory of Jacob. (1.) It is wasted like a man in a consumption, v. 4. *The glory of Jacob* was their numbers, that they were as the sand of the sea for multitude; but this *glory shall be made thin*, when many are cut off, and few left. Then *the fatness of their flesh*, which was their pride and security, *shall wax lean*, and the body of the people shall become a perfect skeleton, nothing but skin and bones. Israel died of a lingering disease; the kingdom of the ten tribes wasted gradually; God was to them *as a moth*, Hos. v. 12. Such is all the glory of this world: it soon withers, and is made thin; but there is a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory designed for the spiritual seed of Jacob, which is not subject to any such decay—fatness of God's house, which will not *wax lean*. (2.) It is all gathered and carried away by the Assyrian army, as the corn is carried out of the field by the husbandmen, v. 5. The corn is the glory of the fields (Ps. lxxv. 13); but, when it is reaped and gone, where is the glory? The people had by their sins made themselves ripe for ruin, and their glory was as quickly, as easily, as justly, and as irresistibly, cut down and taken away, as the corn is out of the field by the husbandman. God's judgments are compared to the *thrusting in of the sickle when the harvest is ripe*, Rev. xiv. 15. And the victorious army, like the careful husbandmen in the valley of Rephaim, where the corn was extraordinary, would not, if they could help it, leave an ear behind, would lose nothing that they could lay their hands on.

6 Yet gleanings shall be left in it, as the shaking of an olive



tree, two *or* three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four *or* five in the outmost fruitful branches thereof, saith the LORD God of Israel. 7 At that day shall a man look to his Maker, and his eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel. 8 And he shall not look to the altars, the work of his hands, neither shall respect *that* which his fingers have made, either the groves, or the images.

Mercy is here reserved, in a parenthesis, in the midst of judgment, for a remnant that should escape the common ruin of the kingdom of the ten tribes. Though the Assyrians took all the care they could that none should slip out of their net, yet the meek of the earth were hidden in the day of the Lord's anger, and had their lives given them for a prey and made comfortable to them by their retirement to the land of Judah, where they had the liberty of God's courts. 1. They shall be but a small remnant, a very few, who shall be marked for preservation (v. 6): *Gleaning grapes shall be left in it.* The body of the people were carried into captivity, but here and there one was left behind, perhaps one of two in a bed when the other was taken, Luke xvii. 34. The most desolating judgments in this world are short of the last judgment, which shall be universal and which none shall escape. In times of the greatest calamity some are kept safe, as in times of the greatest degeneracy some are kept pure. But the fewness of those that escape supposes the captivity of the far greatest part; those that are left are but like the poor remains of an olive tree when it has been carefully shaken by the owner; if there be *two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough* (out of the reach of those that shook it), that is all. Such is the *remnant according to the election of grace*, very few in comparison with the multitudes that walk on in the broad way. 2. They shall be a sanctified remnant, v. 7, 8. These few that are preserved are such as, in the prospect of the judgment approaching, had repented of their sins and reformed their lives, and therefore were snatched thus as brands out of the burning, or such as having escaped, and becoming refugees in strange countries, were awakened, partly by a sense of the distinguishing mercy of their deliverance, and partly by the distresses they were still in, to return to God. (1.) They shall look up to their Creator, shall enquire, *Where is God my Maker, who giveth songs in the night*, in such a night of affliction as this? Job xxxv. 10, 11. They shall acknowledge his hand in all the events concerning them, merciful and afflictive, and shall submit to his hand. They shall give him the glory due to his

name, and be suitably affected with his providences. They shall expect relief and succour from him and depend upon him to help them. *Their eyes shall have respect to him, as the eyes of a servant to the hand of his master*, Ps. cxliii. 2. Observe, It is our duty at all times to have respect to God, to have our eyes ever towards him, both as our Maker (the author of our being and the God of nature) and as the Holy One of Israel, a God in covenant with us and the God of grace; particularly, when we are in affliction, our eyes must be towards the Lord, to *pluck our feet out of the net* (Ps. xxv. 15); to bring us to this is the design of his providence as he is our Maker and the work of his grace as he is the Holy One of Israel. (2.) They shall look off from their idols, the creatures of their own fancy, shall no longer worship them, and seek to them, and expect relief from them. For God will be alone regarded, or he does not look upon himself as at all regarded. He that looks to his Maker must not *look to the altars, the work of his hands*, but disown them and cast them off, must not retain the least respect for *that which his fingers have made*, but break it to pieces, though it be his own workmanship—the *groves and the images*; the word signifies images made in honour of the sun and by which he was worshipped, the most ancient and most plausible idolatry, Deut. iv. 19; Job xxxi. 26. We have reason to account those happy afflictions which part between us and our sins, and by sensible convictions of the vanity of the world, that great idol, cool our affections to it and lower our expectations from it.

9 In that day shall his strong cities be as a forsaken bough, and an uppermost branch, which they left because of the children of Israel: and there shall be desolation. 10 Because thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and hast not been mindful of the rock of thy strength, therefore shalt thou plant pleasant plants, and shalt set it with strange slips: 11 In the day shalt thou make thy plant to grow; and in the morning shalt thou make thy seed to flourish: *but the harvest shall be a heap in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow.*

Here the prophet returns to foretel the woeful desolations that should be made in the land of Israel by the army of the Assyrians. 1. That the cities should be deserted. Even the strong cities, which should have protected the country, shall not be able to protect themselves: *They shall be as a forsaken bough and an uppermost branch of an old tree, which has gone to decay, is forsaken of its leaves, and appears on the top*

of the tree, bare, and dry, and dead; so shall their strong cities look when the inhabitants have deserted them and the victorious army of the enemy pillaged and defaced them, v. 9. They shall be as the cities (so it may be supplied) which the Canaanites left, the old inhabitants of the land, because of the children of Israel, when God brought them in with a high hand, to take possession of that good land, cities which they built not. As the Canaanites then fled before Israel, so Israel should now flee before the Assyrians. And herein the word of God was fulfilled, that, if they committed the same abominations, *the land should spue them out, as it spued out the nations that were before them* (Lev. xviii. 29), and that as, while they had God on their side, *one of them chased a thousand*, so, when they had made him their enemy, *a thousand of them should flee at the rebuke of one*; so that in the cities should be desolation, according to the threatenings in the law, Lev. xxvi. 31; Deut. xxviii. 52. 2. That the country should be laid waste, v. 10, 11. Observe here, (1.) The sin that had provoked God to bring so great a destruction upon that pleasant land. It was *for the iniquity of those that dwelt therein*. "It is because thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation and all the great salvations he has wrought for thee, hast forgotten thy dependence upon him and obligations to him, and hast not been mindful of the rock of thy strength, not only who is himself a strong rock, but who has been thy strength many a time, or thou wouldst have been sunk and broken long since." Note, The God of our salvation is the rock of our strength; and our forgetfulness and unmindfulness of him are at the bottom of all sin. *Therefore have we perverted our way, because we have forgotten the Lord our God, and so we undo ourselves.* (2.) The destruction itself, aggravated by the great care they took to improve their land and to make it yet more pleasant. [1.] Look upon it at the time of the seedness, and it was all like a garden and a vineyard; that pleasant land was replenished with pleasant plants, the choicest of its own growth; nay, so nice and curious were the inhabitants that, not content with them, they sent to all the neighbouring countries for strange slips, the more valuable for being strange, uncommon, far-fetched, and dear-bought, though perhaps they had of their own not inferior to them. This was an instance of their pride and vanity, and (that ruining error) their affection to be like the nations. *Wheat, and honey, and oil* were their staple commodities (Ezek. xxvii. 17); but, not content with these, they must have flowers and greens with strange names imported from other nations, and a great deal of care and pains must be taken by hot-beds to make these plants to grow; the soil must be forced, and they must be covered with glasses to

shelter them, and early in the morning the gardeners must be up to make the seed to flourish, that it may excel those of their neighbours. The ornaments of nature are not to be altogether slighted, but it is a folly to be over-fond of them, and to bestow more time, and cost, and pains about them than they deserve, as many do. But here this instance seems to be put in general for their great industry in cultivating their ground, and their expectations from it accordingly: they doubt not but their plants will grow and flourish. But, [2.] Look upon the same ground at the time of harvest, and it is all like a wilderness, a dismal melancholy place, even to the spectators, much more to the owners; for *the harvest shall be a heap, all in confusion, in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow*. The harvest used to be a time of joy, of singing and shouting (ch. xvi. 10); but this harvest the hungry eat up (Job v. 5), which makes it a day of grief, and the more because the plants were pleasant and costly (v. 10) and their expectations proportionably raised. The harvest had sometimes been a day of grief, if the crop was thin and the weather unseasonable; and yet in that case there was hope that the next would be better. But this shall be desperate sorrow, for they shall see not only this year's products carried off, but the property of the ground altered and their conquerors lords of it. The margin reads it, *The harvest shall be removed* (into the enemy's country or camp, Deut. xxviii. 33) *in the day of inheritance* (when thou thoughtest to inherit it), *and there shall be deadly sorrow*. This is a good reason why we should not lay up our treasure in those things which we may so quickly be despoiled of, but in that good part which shall never be taken away from us.

12 Woe to the multitude of many people, *which* make a noise like the noise of the seas; and to the rushing of nations, *that* make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters! 13 The nations shall rush like the rushing of many waters: but God shall rebuke them, and they shall flee far off, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like a rolling thing before the whirlwind. 14 And behold at evening tide trouble; and before the morning he *is* not. This *is* the portion of them that spoil us, and the lot of them that rob us.

These verses read the doom of those that spoil and rob the people of God. If the Assyrians and Israelites invade and plunder Judah, if the Assyrian army take God's people captive and lay their country waste, let them know that ruin will be their lot and



portion. They are here brought in, 1. Triumphant over the people of God. They relied upon their numbers. The Assyrian army was made up out of divers nations: it was *the multitude of many people* (v. 12), by which weight they hoped to carry the cause. They were very noisy, like the roaring of the seas; they talked big, hectoring, and threatened, to frighten God's people from resisting them, and all their allies from sending in to their aid. Sennacherib and Rabshakeh, in their speeches and letters, made a mighty noise to strike a terror upon Hezekiah and his people; the nations that followed them *made a rushing like the rushing of many waters*, and those mighty ones, that threaten to bear down all before them and carry away every thing that stands in their way. *The floods have lifted up their voice, have lifted up their waves*; such is the tumult of the people, and the heathen, when they rage, Ps. ii. 1; xciii. 3. 2. Triumphant over by the judgments of God. They thought to carry their point by dint of noise; but woe to them (v. 12), for he *shall rebuke them*, that is, God shall, one whom they little think of, have no regard to, stand in no awe of; he shall give them a check with an invisible hand, and then *they shall flee afar off*. Sennacherib, and Rabshakeh, and the remains of their forces, shall run away in a fright, and shall be chased by their own terrors, *as the chaff of the mountains which stand bleak before the wind, and like a rolling thing before the whirlwind*, like thistle-down (so the margin); they make themselves *as chaff before the wind* (Ps. xxxv. 5) and then *the angel of the Lord* (as it follows there), the same angel that slew many of them, shall chase the rest. God will make *them like a wheel*, or rolling thing, and then *persecute them with his tempest and make them afraid with his storm*, Ps. lxxxiii. 13, 15. Note, God can dispirit the enemies of his church when they are most courageous and confident, and dissipate them when they seem most closely consolidated. This shall be done suddenly (v. 14): *At evening-tide* they are very troublesome, and threaten trouble to the people of God; but *before the morning they are not*. At sleeping time they are cast into a deep sleep, Ps. lxxvi. 5, 6. It was in the night that the angel routed the Assyrian army. God can in a moment break the power of his church's enemies, even when it appears most formidable; and this is written for the encouragement of the people of God in all ages, when they find themselves an unequal match for their enemies; for *this is the portion of those that spoil us*, they shall themselves be spoiled. God will plead his church's cause, and those that meddle do it to their own hurt.

## CHAP. XVIII.

Whatever country it is that is meant here by "the land shadowing with wings," here is a woe denounced against it, for God has, upon his people's account, a quarrel with it. 1. They threaten God's people, ver. 1, 2. 11. All the neighbours are hereupon called to

take notice what will be the issue, ver. 3. 11. Though God seem unconcerned in the distress of his people for a time, he will at length appear against their enemies and will remarkably cut them off, ver. 4-6. 14. This shall redound very much to the glory of God, ver. 7.

**W**OE to the land shadowing with wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia: 2 That sendeth ambassadors by the sea, even in vessels of bulrushes upon the waters, *saying*, Go, ye swift messengers, to a nation scattered and peeled, to a people terrible from their beginning hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden down, whose land the rivers have spoiled! 3 All ye inhabitants of the world, and dwellers on the earth, see ye, when he lifteth up an ensign on the mountains; and when he bloweth a trumpet, hear ye. 4 For so the LORD said unto me, I will take my rest, and I will consider in my dwelling place like a clear heat upon herbs, *and* like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest. 5 For afore the harvest, when the bud is perfect, and the sour grape is ripening in the flower, he shall both cut off the sprigs with pruning-hooks, and take away *and* cut down the branches. 6 They shall be left together unto the fowls of the mountains, and to the beasts of the earth: and the fowls shall summer upon them, and all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them. 7 In that time shall the present be brought unto the LORD of hosts of a people scattered and peeled, and from a people terrible from their beginning hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden under foot, whose land the rivers have spoiled, to the place of the name of the LORD of hosts, the mount Zion.

Interpreters are very much at a loss where to find this land that lies beyond the rivers of Cush. Some take it to be Egypt, a maritime country, and full of rivers, and which courted Israel to depend upon them, but proved broken reeds; but against this it is strongly objected that the next chapter is distinguished from this by the title of *the burden of Egypt*. Others take it to be Ethiopia, and read it, *which lies near*, or *about*, *the rivers of Ethiopia*, not that in Africa, which lay south of Egypt, but that which we call *Arabia*, which lay east of Canaan, which Tirhakah was now king of. He thought to protect the Jews, as it were, *under the shadow of his wings*, by giving a

powerful diversion to the king of Assyria, when he made a descent upon his country, at the time that he was attacking Jerusalem, 2 Kings xix. 9. But though by his ambassadors he bade defiance to the king of Assyria, and encouraged the Jews to depend upon him, God by the prophet slights him, and will not go forth with him; he may take his own course, but God will take another course to protect Jerusalem, while he suffers the attempt of Tirhakah to miscarry and his Arabian army to be ruined; for the Assyrian army shall become a present or sacrifice to the Lord of hosts, and to the place of his name, by the hand of an angel, not by the hand of Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, v. 7. This is a very probable exposition of this chapter. But from a hint of Dr. Lightfoot's, in his Harmony of the Old Testament, I incline to understand this chapter as a prophecy against Assyria, and so a continuation of the prophecy in the last three verses of the foregoing chapter, with which therefore this should be joined. That was against the army of the Assyrians which rushed in upon Judah; this is against the land of Assyria itself, which lay beyond the rivers of Arabia, that is, the rivers Euphrates and Tigris, which bordered on *Arabia Deserta*. And in calling it *the land shadowing with wings* he seems to refer to what he himself had said of it (*ch. viii. 8*), that *the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel!* The prophet might perhaps describe the Assyrians by such dark expressions, not naming them, for the same reason that St. Paul, in his prophecy, speaks of the Roman empire by a periphrasis: *He who now letteth*, 2 Thess. ii. 7. Here is,

I. The attempt made by this land (whatever it is) upon a *nation scattered and peeled*, v. 2. Swift messengers are sent by water to proclaim war against them, as a nation marked by Providence, and *meted out*, to be trodden under foot. Whether this refer to the Ethiopians waging war with the Assyrians, or the Assyrians with Judah, it teaches us, 1. That a people which have been terrible from their beginning, have made a figure and borne a mighty sway, may yet become scattered and peeled, and may be spoiled even by their own rivers, that should enrich both the husbandman and the merchant. Nations which have been formidable, and have kept all in awe about them, may by a concurrence of accidents become despicable and an easy prey to their insulting neighbours. 2. Princes and states that are ambitious of enlarging their territories will always have some pretence or other to quarrel with those whose countries they have a mind to. "It is a nation that has been terrible, and therefore we must be revenged on it; it is now a nation scattered and peeled, meted out and trodden down, and therefore it will be an easy prey

for us." Perhaps it was not brought so low as they represented it. God's people are *wrapped on* as a nation scattered and peeled; but whoever think to swallow them up may find them still as terrible as they have been from their beginning; they are cast down, but not deserted, not destroyed.

II. The alarm sounded to the nations about, by which they are summoned to take notice of what God is about to do, v. 3. The Ethiopians and Assyrians have their counsels and designs, which they have laid deep, and promise themselves much from, and, in prosecution of them, send their ambassadors and messengers from place to place; but let us now enquire what the great God says to all this. 1. *He lifts up an ensign upon the mountains, and blows a trumpet*, by which he proclaims war against the enemies of his church, and calls in all her friends and well-wishers into her service, v. 3. He gives notice that he is about to do some great work, as *Lord of hosts*. 2. All the world is bidden to take notice of it; all the dwellers on earth must see the ensign and hear the trumpet, must observe the motions of the divine providence and attend the directions of the divine will. Let all enlist under God's banner, and be on his side, and hearken to the trumpet of his word, which gives not an uncertain sound.

III. The assurance God gives to his prophet, by him to be given to his people, that, though he might seem for a time to sit by as an unconcerned spectator, yet he would certainly and seasonably appear for the comfort of his people and the confusion of his and their enemies (v. 4): *So the Lord said unto me*. Men will have their saying, but God also will have his; and, as we may be sure his word shall stand, so he often whispers it in the ears of his servants the prophets. When he says, *I will take my rest*, it is not as if he were weary of governing the world, or as if he either needed or desired to retire from it and repose himself; but it intimates that the great God has a perfect, undisturbed, enjoyment of himself, in the midst of all the agitations and changes of this world (the Lord sits even upon the floods unshaken; the Eternal Mind is always easy), and, though he may sometimes seem to his people as if he took not wonted notice of what is done in this lower world (they are tempted to think he is *as one asleep*, or *as one astonished*, Ps. xlv. 23; Jer. xiv. 9), yet even then he knows very well what men are doing and what he himself will do.

1. He will take care of his people, and be a shelter to them. He will regard his *dwelling-place*; his eye and his heart are, and shall be, upon it for good continually. Zion is his rest for ever, where he will dwell; and he will *look after it* (so some read it); he will lift up the light of his



countenance upon it, will consider over it what is to be done, and will be sure to do all for the best. He will adapt the comforts and refreshments he provides for his people to the exigencies of their case; and they will *therefore* be acceptable, because seasonable.

(1.) Like a clear heat after rain (so the margin), which is very reviving and pleasant, and makes the herbs to flourish. (2.) Like a dew and a cloud in the heat of harvest, which are very welcome, the dew to the ground and the cloud to the labourers. Note, There is that in God which is a shelter and refreshment to his people in all weathers and arms them against the inconveniences of every change. Is the weather cool? There is that in his favour which will warm them. Is it hot? There is that in his favour which will cool them. Great men have their winter-house and their summer-house (Amos iii. 15); but those that are at home with God have both in him.

2. He will reckon with his and their enemies, v. 5, 6. When the Assyrian army promises itself a plentiful harvest in the taking of Jerusalem and the plundering of that rich city, when the bud of that project is perfect, before the harvest is gathered in, while the sour grape of their enmity to Hezekiah and his people is ripening in the flower and the design is just ready to be put in execution, God shall destroy that army as easily as the husbandman cuts off the sprigs of the vine with pruning hooks, or because the grape is sour and good for nothing, and will not be cured, *takes away and cuts down the branches*. This seems to point at the overthrow of the Assyrian army by a destroying angel, when the dead bodies of the soldiers were scattered like the branches and sprigs of a wild vine, which the husbandman has cut to pieces. *And they shall be left to the fowls of the mountains, and the beasts of the earth, to prey upon*, both winter and summer; for as God's people are protected all seasons of the year, both in cold and heat (v. 4), so their enemies are at all seasons exposed; birds and beasts of prey shall both summer and winter upon them, till they are quite ruined.

IV. The tribute of praise which should be brought to God from all this (v. 7): *In that time*, when this shall be accomplished, *shall the present be brought unto the Lord of hosts*. 1. Some understand this of the conversion of the Ethiopians to the faith of Christ in the latter days, of which we have the specimen and beginning in Philip's baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch, Acts viii. 27, &c. Those that were a *people scattered and peeled, meted out, and trodden down* (v. 2), shall be a present to the Lord: and, though they seem useless and worthless, they shall be an acceptable present to him who judges of men by the sincerity of their faith and love, not by the pomp and prosperity of their outward condition. *Therefore the*

gospel was ministered to the Gentiles that *the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable*, Rom. xv. 16. It is prophesied (Ps. lxxviii. 31) that *Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God*. 2. Others understand it of the spoil of Sennacherib's army, out of which, as usual, presents were brought to *the Lord of hosts*, Num. xxxi. 50. It was the present of a people scattered and peeled. (1.) It was won from the Assyrians, who were now themselves reduced to such a condition as they scornfully described Judah to be in, v. 2. Those that unjustly trample upon others shall themselves be justly trampled upon. (2.) It was offered by the people of God, who were, in disdain, called a *people scattered and peeled*. God will put honour upon his people, though men put contempt upon them. *Lastly*, Observe, The present that is brought to the Lord of hosts must be brought to the *place of the name of the Lord of hosts*; what is offered to God must be offered in the way that he has appointed; we must be sure to attend him, and expect him to meet us, where he records his name.

## CHAP. XIX.

As Assyria was a breaking rod to Judah, with which it was smitten, so Egypt was a broken reed, with which it was cheated; and therefore God had a quarrel with them both. We have before read the doom of the Assyrians; now here we have the burden of Egypt, a prophecy concerning that nation, I. That it should be greatly weakened and brought low, and should be as contemptible among the nations as now it was considerable, rendered so by a complication of judgments which God would bring upon them, ver. 1-17. II. That at length God's holy religion should be brought into Egypt, and set up there, in part by the Jews that should flee thither for refuge, but more fully by the preachers of the gospel of Christ, through whose ministry churches should be planted in Egypt in the days of the Messiah (ver. 18-25), which would abundantly balance all the calamities here threatened.

**T**HE burden of Egypt. Behold, the LORD rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt: and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it. 2 And I will set the Egyptians against the Egyptians: and they shall fight every one against his brother, and every one against his neighbour; city against city, and kingdom against kingdom. 3 And the spirit of Egypt shall fail in the midst thereof; and I will destroy the counsel thereof: and they shall seek to the idols, and to the charmers, and to them that have familiar spirits, and to the wizards. 4 And the Egyptians will I give over into the hand of a cruel lord; and a fierce king shall rule over them, saith the LORD, the LORD of hosts. 5 And the waters shall fail from the sea, and the river shall

be wasted and dried up. 6 And they shall turn the rivers far away; *and* the brooks of defence shall be emptied and dried up: the reeds and flags shall wither. 7 The paper reeds by the brooks, by the mouth of the brooks, and every thing sown by the brooks, shall wither, be driven away, and be no *more*. 8 The fishers also shall mourn, and all they that cast angle into the brooks shall lament, and they that spread nets upon the waters shall languish. 9 Moreover they that work in fine flax, and they that weave networks, shall be confounded. 10 And they shall be broken in the purposes thereof, all that make sluices *and* ponds for fish. 11 Surely the princes of Zoan are fools, the counsel of the wise counsellors of Pharaoh is become brutish: how say ye unto Pharaoh, *I am* the son of the wise, the son of ancient kings? 12 Where *are* they? Where *are* thy wise *men*? And let them tell thee now, and let them know what the LORD of hosts hath purposed upon Egypt. 13 The princes of Zoan are become fools, the princes of Noph are deceived; they have also seduced Egypt, *even they that are* the stay of the tribes thereof. 14 The LORD hath mingled a perverse spirit in the midst thereof: and they have caused Egypt to err in every work thereof, as a drunken *man* staggereth in his vomit. 15 Neither shall there be *any* work for Egypt, which the head or tail, branch or rush, may do. 16 In that day shall Egypt be like unto women: and it shall be afraid and fear because of the shaking of the hand of the LORD of hosts, which he shaketh over it. 17 And the land of Judah shall be a terror unto Egypt, every one that maketh mention thereof shall be afraid in himself, because of the counsel of the LORD of hosts, which he hath determined against it.

Though the land of Egypt had of old been a house of bondage to the people of God, where they had been ruled with rigour, yet among the unbelieving Jews there still remained much of the humour of their fathers, who said, *Let us make us a captain*

*and return into Egypt.* Upon all occasions they trusted to Egypt for help (*ch. xxx. 2*), and thither they fled, in disobedience to God's express command, when things were brought to the last extremity in their own country, *Jer. xliii. 7*. Rabshakeh upbraided Hezekiah with this, *ch. xxxvi. 6*. While they kept up an alliance with Egypt, and it was a powerful ally, they stood not in awe of the judgments of God; for against them they depended upon Egypt to protect them. Nor did they depend upon the power of God when at any time they were in distress; but Egypt was their confidence. To prevent all this mischief, Egypt must be mortified, and many ways God here tells them he will take to mortify them.

I. The gods of Egypt shall appear to them to be what they always really were, utterly unable to help them, *v. 1*. "*The Lord rides upon a cloud, a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt.* As a judge goes in state to the bench to try and condemn the malefactors, or as a general takes the field with his troops to crush the rebels, so shall God come into Egypt with his judgments; and when he comes he will certainly overcome." In all this burden of Egypt here is no mention of any foreign enemy invading them; but God himself will come against them, and raise up the causes of their destruction from among themselves. He comes upon a cloud, above the reach of opposition or resistance. He comes apace upon a swift cloud; for their judgment lingers not when the time has come. *He rides upon the wings of the wind*, with a majesty far excelling the greatest pomp and splendour of earthly princes. *He makes the clouds his chariots*, *Ps. xviii. 9*; *civ. 3*. When he comes the idols of Egypt shall be moved, shall be removed at his presence, and perhaps be made to fall as Dagon did before the ark. Isis, Osiris, and Apis, those celebrated idols of Egypt, being found unable to relieve their worshippers, shall be disowned and rejected by them. Idolatry had got deeper rooting in Egypt than in any land besides, even the most absurd idolatries; and yet now the idols shall be moved and they shall be ashamed of them. When the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt he executed judgments upon the gods of the Egyptians (*Num. xxxiii. 4*); no marvel then if, when he comes, they begin to tremble. The Egyptians shall seek to the idols, when they are at their wits' end, and consult the charmers and wizards (*v. 3*); but all in vain; they see their ruin hastening on them notwithstanding.

II. The militia of Egypt, that had been famed for their valour, shall be quite dispirited and disheartened. No kingdom in the world was ever in a better method of keeping up a standing army than the Egyptians were; but now their heroes, that used to be celebrated for courage, shall be posted for cowards: *The heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it*, like wax before the fire (*v.*



1); *the spirit of Egypt shall fail*, v. 3. They shall have no inclination, no resolution, to stand up in defence of their country, their liberty, and property; but shall tamely and ingloriously yield all to the invader and oppressor. The Egyptians *shall be like women* (v. 16); they shall be frightened and put into confusion by the least alarm; even those that dwell in the heart of the country, in the midst of it, and therefore furthest from danger, will be as full of frights as those that are situate on the frontiers. Let not the bold and brave be proud or secure, for God can easily *cut off the spirit of princes* (Ps. lxxvi. 12) and *take away their hearts*, Job xii. 24.

III. The Egyptians shall be embroiled in endless dissensions and quarrels among themselves. There shall be no occasion to bring a foreign force upon them to destroy them; they shall destroy one another (v. 2): *I will set the Egyptians against the Egyptians*. As these divisions and animosities are their sin, God is not the author of them, they come from men's lusts; but God, as a Judge, permits them for their punishment, and by their destroying differences corrects them for their sinful agreements. Instead of helping one another, and acting each in his place for the common good, *they shall fight every one against his brother and neighbour*, whom he ought to love as himself—*city against city, and kingdom against kingdom*. Egypt was then divided into twelve provinces, or dynasties; but Psammetichus, the governor of one of them, by setting them at variance with one another, at length made himself master of them all. A kingdom thus divided against itself would soon be brought to desolation. *En quo discordia cives perduxit miseros!—Oh the wretchedness brought upon a people by their disagreements among themselves!* It is brought to this by a *perverse spirit*, a spirit of contradiction, which the Lord would mingle, as an intoxicating draught made up of several ingredients, for the Egyptians, v. 14. One party shall be for a thing for no other reason than because the other is against it; that is a perverse spirit, which, if it mingle with the public counsels, tends directly to the ruin of the public interests.

IV. Their politics shall be all blasted, and turned into foolishness. When God will destroy the nation he will *destroy the counsel thereof* (v. 3), by taking away wisdom from the statesmen (Job xii. 20), or setting them one against another (as Hushai and Ahithophel), or by his providence breaking their measures even when they seemed well hid; so that the *princes of Zoan are fools*: they make fools of one another, every one betrays his own folly, and divine Providence makes fools of them all, v. 11. Pharaoh had his wise counsellors. Egypt was famous for such. But their *counsel has all become brutish*; they have lost all their forecast;

one would think they had become idiots, and were bereaved of common sense. Let no man glory then in his own wisdom, nor depend upon that, nor upon the wisdom of those about him; for he that gives understanding can when he please take it away. And from those it is most likely to be taken away that boast of their policy, as Pharaoh's counsellors here did, and, to recommend themselves to places of public trust, boast of their great understanding (*"I am the son of the wise, of the God of wisdom, of wisdom itself,"* says one; "my father was an eminent privy-counsellor of note in his day for wisdom"), or of the antiquity and dignity of their families: "I am," says another, *"the son of ancient kings."* The nobles of Egypt boasted much of their antiquity, producing fabulous records of their succession for above 10,000 years. This humour prevailed much among them about this time, as appears by Herodotus, their common boast being that Egypt was some thousands of years more ancient than any other nation. "But *where are thy wise men?*" v. 12. Let them now show their wisdom by foreseeing what ruin is coming upon their nation, and preventing it, if they can. Let them with all their skill *know what the Lord of hosts has purposed upon Egypt*, and arm themselves accordingly. Nay, so far are they from doing this that they themselves are, in effect, contriving the ruin of Egypt, and hastening it on, v. 13. *The princes of Noph* are not only deceived themselves, but they *have seduced Egypt*, by putting their kings upon arbitrary proceedings" (by which both themselves and their people were soon undone); "the governors of Egypt, that are the stay and corner-stones of the tribes thereof, are themselves undermining it." It is sad with a people when those that undertake for their safety are helping forward their destruction, and the physicians of the state are her worst disease, when the things that belong to the public peace are so far hidden from the eyes of those that are entrusted with the public counsels that in every thing they blunder and take wrong measures; so here (v. 14): *They have caused Egypt to err in every work thereof*. Every step they took was a false step. They always mistook either the end or the means, and their counsels were all unsteady and uncertain, like the staggerings and stammerings of a drunken man in his vomit, who knows not what he says nor where he goes. See what reason we have to pray for our privy-counsellors and ministers of state, who are the great supports and blessings of the state if God give them a spirit of wisdom, but quite the contrary if he hide their heart from understanding.

V. The rod of government shall be turned into the serpent of tyranny and oppression (v. 4): *"The Egyptians will I give over into the hand of a cruel lord, not a foreigner, but*

one of their own, one that shall rule over them by an hereditary right, but shall be a fierce king and rule them with rigour," either the twelve tyrants that succeeded Sethon, or rather Psammetichus that recovered the monarchy again; for he speaks of one cruel lord. Now the barbarous usage which the Egyptian task-masters gave to God's Israel long ago was remembered against them and they were paid in their own coin by another Pharaoh. It is sad with a people when the powers that should be for edification are for destruction, and they are ruined by those by whom they should be ruled, when such as this is the manner of the king, as it is described (*in terrorem—in order to impress alarm*) 1 Sam. viii. 11.

VI. Egypt was famous for its river Nile, which was its wealth, and strength, and beauty, and was idolized by them. Now it is here threatened that *the waters shall fail from the sea and the river shall be wasted and dried up*, v. 5. Nature shall not herein favour them as she has done. Egypt was never watered with the rain of heaven (Zech. xiv. 18), and therefore the fruitfulness of their country depended wholly upon the overflowing of their river; if that therefore be dried up, their fruitful land will soon be turned into barrenness and their harvests cease: *Every thing sown by the brooks will wither* of course, *will be driven away, and be no more*, v. 7. If the paper-reeds by the brooks, at the very mouth of them, wither, much more the corn, which lies at a greater distance, but derives its moisture from them. Yet this is not all; the drying up of their rivers is the destruction, 1. Of their fortifications, for they are *brooks of defence* (v. 6), making the country difficult of access to an enemy. Deep rivers are the strongest lines, and most hardly forced. Pharaoh is said to be a *great dragon lying in the midst of his rivers*, and guarded by them, bidding defiance to all about him, Ezek. xxix. 3. But these *shall be emptied and dried up*, not by an enemy, as Sennacherib with the *sole of his foot dried up nightly rivers* (ch. xxxvii. 25), and as Cyrus, who took Babylon by drawing Euphrates into many streams, but by the providence of God, which sometimes *turns water-springs into dry ground*, Ps. cvii. 33. 2. It is the destruction of their fish, which in Egypt was much of their food, witness that base reflection which the children of Israel made (Num. xi. 5): *We remember the fish which we did eat in Egypt freely*. The drying up of the rivers will *kill the fish* (Ps. cv. 29), and will thereby ruin those who make it their business, (1.) To catch fish, whether by angling or nets (v. 8); they shall *lament and languish*, for their trade is at an end. There is nothing which the children of this world do more heartily lament than the loss of that which they used to get money by. *Ploratur lachrymis amissa pecunia veris—Those are genuine tears which*

*are shed over lost money.* (2.) To keep fish, that it may be ready when it is called for. There were those that *made sluices and ponds for fish* (v. 10), but *they shall be broken in the purposes thereof*; their business will fail, either for want of water to fill their ponds or for want of fish to replenish their waters. God can find ways to deprive a country even of that which is its staple commodity. The Egyptians may themselves remember *the fish they have formerly eaten freely*, but now cannot have for money. And that which aggravates the loss of these advantages by the river is that it is their own doing (v. 6): *They shall turn the rivers far away*. Their kings and great men, to gratify their own fancy, will drain water from the main river to their own houses and grounds at a distance, preferring their private convenience before the public good, and so by degrees the force of the river is sensibly weakened. Thus many do themselves a greater prejudice at last than they think of, [1.] Who pretend to be wiser than nature, and to do better for themselves than nature has done. [2.] Who consult their own particular interest more than the common good. Such may gratify themselves, but surely they can never satisfy themselves, who to serve a turn contribute to a public calamity, which they themselves, in the long run, cannot avoid sharing in. Herodotus tells us that Pharaoh-Necho (who reigned not long after this), projecting to cut a free passage by water from Nilus into the Red Sea, employed a vast number of men to make a ditch or channel for that purpose, in which attempt he impaired the river, lost 120,000 of his people, and yet left the work unaccomplished.

VII. Egypt was famous for the linen manufacture; but that trade shall be ruined. Solomon's merchants traded with Egypt for linen-yarn, 1 Kings x. 28. Their country produced the best flax and the best hands to work it; but *those that work in fine flax shall be confounded* (v. 9), either for want of flax to work on or for want of a demand for that which they have worked or opportunity to export it. The decay of trade weakens and wastes a nation and by degrees brings it to ruin. The trade of Egypt must needs sink, for (v. 15) *there shall not be any work for Egypt to be employed in*; and where there is nothing to be done there is nothing to be got. There shall be a universal stop put to business, *no work which either head or tail, branch or rush, may do*; nothing for high or low, weak or strong, to do; *no hire*, Zech. viii. 10. Note, The flourishing of a kingdom depends much upon the industry of the people; and then things are likely to do well when all hands are at work, when the head and top-branch do not disdain to labour, and the labour of the tail and rush is not disdained. But when the learned professions are unemployed, the principal merchants



have no stocks, and the handicraft tradesmen nothing to do, poverty comes upon a people *as one that travaileth and as an armed man.*

VIII. A general consternation shall seize the Egyptians; *they shall be afraid and fear* (v. 16), which will be both an evidence of a universal decay and a means and presage of utter ruin. Two things will put them into this fright:—1. What they hear from the land of Judah; *that shall be a terror to Egypt, v. 17.* When they hear of the desolations made in Judah by the army of Sennacherib, considering both the near neighbourhood and the strict alliance that was between them and Judah, they will conclude it must be their turn next to become a prey to that victorious army. When their neighbour's house was on fire they could not but see their own in danger; and therefore every one of the Egyptians that makes mention of Judah shall be afraid of himself, expecting the bitter cup shortly to be put into his hands. 2. What they see in their own land. They shall fear (v. 16) *because of the shaking of the hand of the Lord of hosts, and (v. 17) because of the counsel of the Lord of hosts, which from the shaking of his hand they shall conclude he has determined against Egypt as well as Judah.* For, if judgment begin at the house of God, where will it end? *If this be done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?* See here, (1.) How easily God can make those a terror to themselves that have been, not only secure, but a terror to all about them. It is but shaking his hand over them, or laying it upon some of their neighbours, and the stoutest hearts tremble immediately. (2.) How well it becomes us to fear before God when he does but shake his hand over us, and to humble ourselves under his mighty hand when it does but threaten us, especially when we see his counsel determined against us; for who can change his counsel?

18 In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the LORD of hosts; one shall be called, The city of destruction. 19 In that day shall there be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to the LORD. 20 And it shall be for a sign and for a witness unto the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt: for they shall cry unto the LORD because of the oppressors, and he shall send them a saviour, and a great one, and he shall deliver them. 21 And the LORD shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the LORD in that day, and shall do sacrifice and

oblation; yea, they shall vow a vow unto the LORD and perform it. 22 And the LORD shall smite Egypt: he shall smite and heal it: and they shall return *even* to the LORD, and he shall be entreated of them, and shall heal them. 23 In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. 24 In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt, and with Assyria, *even* a blessing in the midst of the land: 25 Whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance.

Out of the thick and threatening clouds of the foregoing prophecy the sun of comfort here breaks forth, and it is the sun of righteousness. Still God has mercy in store for Egypt, and he will show it, not so much by reviving their trade and replenishing their river again as by bringing the true religion among them, calling them to, and accepting them in, the worship of the one only living and true God; and these blessings of grace were much more valuable than all the blessings of nature wherewith Egypt was enriched. We know not of any event in which this prophecy can be thought to have its full accomplishment short of the conversion of Egypt to the faith of Christ, by the preaching (as is supposed) of Mark the Evangelist, and the founding of many Christian churches there, which flourished for many ages. Many prophecies of this book point to the days of the Messiah; and why not this? It is no unusual thing to speak of gospel graces and ordinances in the language of the Old-Testament institutions. And, in these prophecies, those words, *in that day*, perhaps have not always a reference to what goes immediately before, but have a peculiar significance pointing at that day which had been so long fixed, and so often spoken of, when the day-spring from on high should visit this dark world. Yet it is not improbable (which some conjecture) that this prophecy was in part fulfilled when those Jews who fled from their own country to take shelter in Egypt, when Sennacherib invaded their land, brought their religion along with them, and, being awakened to great seriousness by the troubles they were in, made an open and zealous profession of it there, and were instrumental to bring many of the Egyptians to embrace it, which was an earnest and specimen of the more plentiful harvest of souls that should be gathered in

to God by the preaching of the gospel of Christ. Josephus indeed tells us that Onias the son of Onias the high priest, living an outlaw at Alexandria in Egypt, obtained leave of Ptolemy Philometer, then king, and Cleopatra his queen, to build a temple to the God of Israel; like that at Jerusalem, at Babylon in Egypt, and pretended a warrant for doing it from this prophecy in Isaiah, that there shall be an altar to the Lord in the land of Egypt; and the service of God, Josephus affirms, continued in it about 333 years, when it was shut up by Paulinus soon after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans; see *Joseph. Antiq. l. 13. c. 6*, and *de Bell. Judaic. l. 7. c. 30*. But that temple was all along looked upon by the pious Jews as so great an irregularity, and an affront to the temple at Jerusalem, that we cannot suppose this prophecy to be fulfilled in it.

Observe how the conversion of Egypt is here described.

I. They shall *speaking the language of Canaan*, the holy language, the scripture-language; they shall not only understand it, but use it (*v. 18*); they shall introduce that language among them, and converse freely with the people of God, and not, as they used to do, *by an interpreter*, Gen. xlii. 23. Note, Converting grace, by changing the heart, changes the language; *for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks*. Five cities in Egypt shall speak this language; so many Jews shall come to reside in Egypt, and they shall so multiply there, that they shall soon replenish five cities, one of which shall be the city of Heres, or of the sun, Heliopolis, where the sun was worshipped, the most infamous of all the cities of Egypt for idolatry; even there shall be a wonderful reformation, they shall speak the language of Canaan. Or it may be taken thus, as we render it—That for every five cities that shall embrace religion there shall be one (a sixth part of the cities of Egypt) that shall reject it, and that shall be called a *city of destruction*, because it refuses the methods of salvation.

II. They shall swear to the Lord of hosts, not only swear by him, giving him the honour of appealing to him, as all nations did to the gods they worshipped; but they shall by a solemn oath and vow devote themselves to his honour and bind themselves to his service. They shall swear to cleave to him with purpose of heart, and shall worship him, not occasionally, but constantly. They shall swear allegiance to him as their King, to Christ, to whom all judgment is committed.

III. They shall set up the public worship of God in their land (*v. 19*): *There shall be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt*, an altar on which they shall do sacrifice and oblation (*v. 21*); therefore it must be understood spiritually. Christ, the great altar, who sanctifies every gift, shall be owned there, and the gospel sacrifices of

prayer and praise shall be offered up; for by the law of Moses there was to be no altar for sacrifice but that at Jerusalem. In Christ Jesus all distinction of nations is taken away; and a spiritual altar, a gospel church, in the midst of the land of Egypt, is as acceptable to God as one in the midst of the land of Israel; and spiritual sacrifices of faith and love, and a contrite heart, *please the Lord better than an ox or bullock*.

IV. There shall be a face of religion upon the nation, and an open profession made of it, discernible to all who come among them. Not only in the heart of the country, but even in the borders of it, *there shall be a pillar*, or pillars, inscribed, *To Jehovah*, to his honour, as before there had been such pillars set up in honour of false gods. As soon as a stranger entered upon the borders of Egypt he might perceive what God they worshipped. Those that serve God must not be ashamed to own him, but be forward to do any thing that may be for a sign and for a witness to the Lord of hosts. Even in the land of Egypt he had some faithful worshippers, who boasted of their relation to him and made his name their strong tower, or bulwark, on their borders, with which their coasts were fortified against all assailants.

V. Being in distress, they shall seek to God, and he shall be found of them; and this shall be a sign and a witness for the Lord of hosts that he is a God hearing prayer to all flesh that come to him, *v. 20*. See Ps. lxxv. 2. When they cry to God by reason of their oppressors, the cruel lords that shall rule over them (*v. 4*), he shall be entreated of them (*v. 22*); whereas he had told his people Israel, who had made it their own choice to have such a king, that they should cry to him by reason of their king, and he would not hear them, 1 Sam. viii. 18.

VI. They shall have an interest in the great Redeemer. When they were under the oppression of cruel lords perhaps God sometimes raised them up mighty deliverers, as he did for Israel in the days of the judges; and by them, though he had smitten the land, he healed it again; and, upon their return to God in a way of duty, he returned to them in a way of mercy, and repaired the breaches of their tottering state. For repenting Egyptians shall find the same favour with God that repenting Ninevites did. But all these deliverances wrought for them, as those for Israel, were but figures of gospel salvation. Doubtless Jesus Christ is the Saviour and the great one here spoken of, whom God will send the glad tidings of to the Egyptians, and by whom he will deliver them out of the hands of their enemies, that they may serve him without fear, Luke i. 74, 75. Jesus Christ delivered the Gentile nations from the service of dumb idols, and did himself both purchase and preach liberty to the captives.

VII. The knowledge of God shall prevail



among them, v. 21. 1. They shall have the means of knowledge. For many ages in *Judah only was God known*, for there only were the lively oracles found; but now *the Lord*, and his name and will, *shall be known to Egypt*. Perhaps this may in part refer to the translation of the Old Testament out of Hebrew into Greek by the LXX., which was done at Alexandria in Egypt, by the command of Ptolemy king of Egypt; and it was the first time that the scriptures were translated into any other language. By the help of this (the Grecian monarchy having introduced their language into that country) *the Lord was known to Egypt*, and a happy omen and means it was of his being further known. 2. They shall have grace to improve those means. It is promised not only that the Lord shall be known to Egypt, but that *the Egyptians shall know the Lord*; they shall receive and entertain the light granted to them, and shall submit themselves to the power of it. The Lord is known to our nation, and yet I fear there are many of our nation that do not know the Lord. But the promise of the new covenant is that *all shall know the Lord, from the least even to the greatest*, which promise is sure to all the seed. The effect of this knowledge of God is *that they shall vow a vow to the Lord and perform it*. For those do not know God aright who either are not willing to come under binding obligations to the Lord or do not make good those obligations.

VIII. They shall come into the communion of saints. Being joined to the Lord, they shall be added to the church, and be incorporated with all the saints. 1. All enmities shall be slain. Mortal feuds there had been between Egypt and Assyria; they often made war upon one another; but now *there shall be a highway between Egypt and Assyria* (v. 23), a happy correspondence settled between the two nations; they shall trade with one another, and every thing that passes between them shall be friendly. *The Egyptians shall serve* (shall worship the true God) *with the Assyrians*; and therefore the Assyrians shall come into Egypt and the Egyptians into Assyria. Note, It becomes those who have communion with the same God, through the same Mediator, to keep up an amicable correspondence with one another. The consideration of our meeting at the same throne of grace, and our serving with each other in the same business of religion, should put an end to all heats and animosities, and knit our hearts to each other in holy love. 2. The Gentile nations shall not only unite with each other in the gospel fold under Christ the great shepherd, but they shall all be united with the Jews. When Egypt and Assyria become partners in serving God *Israel shall make a third with them* (v. 24); they shall become a *three-fold cord, not easily broken*. The ceremonial law, which had long been the partition-wall between Jews

and Gentiles, shall be taken down, and then they shall become *one sheep-fold under one shepherd*. Thus united, they shall be *a blessing in the midst of the land, whom the Lord of hosts shall bless*, v. 24, 25. (1.) Israel shall be a blessing to them all, because of them, *as concerning the flesh, Christ came*, and they were the natural branches of the good olive, to whom did originally pertain its root and fatness, and the Gentiles were but *grafted in among them*, Rom. xi. 17. Israel lay between Egypt and Assyria, and was a blessing to them both by bringing them to meet in that word of the Lord which went forth from Jerusalem, and that church which was first set up in the land of Israel. *Qui conveniunt in aliquo tertio inter se conveniunt*—*Those who meet in a third meet in each other*. Israel is that third in whom Egypt and Assyria agree, and is therefore a blessing; for those are real and great blessings to their generation who are instrumental to unite those that have been at variance. (2.) They shall all be a blessing to the world: so the Christian church is, made up of Jews and Gentiles; it is the beauty, riches, and support of the world. (3.) They shall all be blessed of the Lord. [1.] They shall all be owned by him as his. Though Egypt was formerly a house of bondage to the people of God, and Assyria an unjust invader of them, all this shall now be forgiven and forgotten, and they shall be as welcome to God as Israel. They are all alike his people whom he takes under his protection. They are formed by him, for they are the *work of his hands*; not only as a people, but as *his people*. They are formed for him; for they are his inheritance, precious in his eyes, and dear to him, and from whom he has his rent of honour out of this lower world. [2.] They shall be owned together by him as jointly his, his in concert; they shall all share in one and the same blessing. Note, Those that are united in the love and blessing of God ought, for that reason, to be united to each other in charity.

## CHAP. XX.

This chapter is a prediction of the carrying away of multitudes both of the Egyptians and the Ethiopians into captivity by the king of Assyria. Here is, I. the sign by which this was foretold, which was the prophet's going for some time barefoot and almost naked, like a poor captive, ver. 1—2. II. The explication of that sign, with application to Egypt and Ethiopia, ver. 3—5. III. The good use which the people of God should make of this, which is never to trust in an arm of flesh, because thus it will deceive them, ver. 6.

**I**N the year that Tartan came unto Ashdod (when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him), and fought against Ashdod, and took it; 2 At the same time spake the LORD by Isaiah the son of Amos, saying, Go and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, and put off thy shoe from thy foot. And he did so, walking naked and barefoot. 3 And the LORD said,

Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years *for* a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia; 4 So shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners, and the Ethiopians captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, even with *their* buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt. 5 And they shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation, and of Egypt their glory. 6 And the inhabitant of this isle shall say in that day, Behold, such *is* our expectation, whither we flee for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria: and how shall we escape?

God here, as King of nations, brings a sore calamity upon Egypt and Ethiopia, but, as King of saints, brings good to his people out of it. Observe,

I. The date of this prophecy. It was in the year that Ashdod, a strong city of the Philistines (but which some think was lately recovered from them by Hezekiah, when he smote the Philistines even unto Gaza, 2 Kings xviii. 8), was besieged and taken by an army of the Assyrians. It is uncertain what year of Hezekiah that was, but the event was so remarkable that those who lived then could by that token fix the time to a year. He that was now king of Assyria is called *Sargon*, which some take to be the same with Sennacherib; others think he was his immediate predecessor, and succeeded Shalmaneser. Tartan, who was general, or commander-in-chief, in this expedition, was one of Sennacherib's officers, sent by him to bid defiance to Hezekiah, in concurrence with Rabshakeh, 2 Kings xviii. 17.

II. The making of Isaiah a sign, by his unusual dress when he walked abroad. He had been a sign to his own people of the melancholy times that had come and were coming upon them, by the sackcloth which for some time he had worn, of which he had a gown made, which he girt about him. Some think he put himself into that habit of a mourner upon occasion of the captivity of the ten tribes. Others think sackcloth was what he commonly wore as a prophet, to show himself mortified to the world, and that he might learn to endure hardness; soft clothing better becomes those that attend in king's palaces (Matt. xi. 8) than those that go on God's errands. Elijah wore hair-cloth (2 Kings i. 8), and John Baptist (Matt. iii. 4) and those that pretended to be prophets supported their pretension by wearing rough garments (Zech. xiii. 4); but Isaiah has orders given him to *loose his sackcloth from his loins*, not to exchange it for better clothing, but for none

at all—no upper garment, no mantle, cloak, or coat, but only that which was next to him, we may suppose his shirt, waistcoat, and drawers; and he must *put off his shoes*, and go barefoot; so that compared with the dress of others, and what he himself usually wore, he might be said to go *naked*. This was a great hardship upon the prophet; it was a blemish to his reputation, and would expose him to contempt and ridicule; the boys in the streets would hoot at him, and those who sought occasion against him would say, *The prophet is indeed a fool, and the spiritual man is mad*, Hosea ix. 7. It might likewise be a prejudice to his health; he was in danger of catching a cold, which might throw him into a fever, and cost him his life; but God bade him do it, that he might give a proof of his obedience to God in a most difficult command, and so shame the disobedience of his people to the most easy and reasonable precepts. When we are in the way of our duty we may trust God both with our credit and with our safety. The hearts of that people were strangely stupid, and would not be affected with what they only heard, but must be taught by signs, and therefore Isaiah must do this for their edification. If the dress was scandalous, yet the design was glorious, and what a prophet of the Lord needed not to be ashamed of.

III. The exposition of this sign, v. 3, 4. It was intended to signify that the Egyptians and the Ethiopians should be led away captive by the king of Assyria, thus stripped, or in rags, and very shabby clothing, as Isaiah was. God calls him his *servant Isaiah*, because in this matter particularly he had approved himself God's willing, faithful, obedient servant; and for this very thing, which perhaps others laughed at him for, God gloried in him. To obey is better than sacrifice; it pleases God and praises him more, and shall be more praised by him. Isaiah is said to have *walked naked and barefoot three years*, whenever in that time he appeared as a prophet. But some refer the three years, not to the sign, but to the thing signified: *He has walked naked and barefoot*; there is a stop in the original provided he did so once that was enough to give occasion to all about him to enquire what was the meaning of his doing so; or, as some think, he did it three days, a day for a year; and this for a three years' sign and wonder, for a sign of that which should be done three years afterwards or which should be three years in the doing. Three campaigns successively shall the Assyrian army make, in spoiling the Egyptians and Ethiopians, and carrying them away captive in this barbarous manner, not only the soldiers taken in the field of battle, but the inhabitants, young and old; and it being a very piteous sight, and such as must needs move compassion in those that had the least degree of tenderness left them to see those



who had gone all their days well dressed now stripped, and scarcely having rags to cover their nakedness, that circumstance of their captivity is particularly taken notice of, and foretold, the more to affect those to whom this prophecy was delivered. It is particularly said to be *to the shame of Egypt* (v. 4), because the Egyptians were a proud people, and therefore when they did fall into disgrace it was the more shameful to them; and the higher they had lifted up themselves the lower was their fall, both in their own eyes and in the eyes of others.

IV. The use and application of this, v. 5, 6. 1. All that had any dependence upon, or correspondence with, Egypt and Ethiopia, should now be ashamed of them, and afraid of having any thing to do with them. Those countries that were in danger of being overrun by the Assyrians expected that Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia, with his numerous forces, would put a stop to the progress of their victorious arms, and be a barrier to his neighbours; and with yet more assurance they gloried that Egypt, a kingdom so famous for policy and prowess, would do their business, would oblige them to raise the siege of Ashdod and retire with precipitation. But, instead of this, by attempting to oppose the king of Assyria they did but expose themselves and make their country a prey to him. Hereupon all about them were ashamed that ever they promised themselves any advantage from two such weak and cowardly nations, and were more afraid now than ever they were of the growing greatness of the king of Assyria, before whom Egypt and Ethiopia proved but as briars and thorns put to stop a consuming fire, which do but make it burn the more strongly. Note, Those who make any creature their expectation and glory, and so put it in the place of God, will sooner or later be ashamed of it, and their disappointment in it will but increase their fear. See Ezek. xxix. 6, 7. 2. The Jews in particular should be convinced of their folly in resting upon such broken reeds, and should despair of any relief from them (v. 6): *The inhabitants of this isle* (the land of Judah, situated upon the sea, though not surrounded by it), of this country (so the margin); every one shall now have his eyes opened, and shall say, "*Behold, such is our expectation*, so vain, so foolish, and this is that which it will come to. We have fled for help to the Egyptians and Ethiopians, and have hoped by them to be delivered from the king of Assyria; but, now that they are broken thus, how shall we escape, that are not able to bring such armies into the field as they did?" Note, (1.) Those that confide in creatures will be disappointed, and will be made ashamed of their confidence; *for vain is the help of man, and in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills or the height and*

*multitude of the mountains.* (2.) Disappointment in creature confidences, instead of driving us to despair, as here (*how shall we escape?*), should drive us to God; for, if we flee to him for help, our expectation shall not be frustrated.

## CHAP. XXI.

In this chapter we have a prophecy of sad times coming, and heavy burdens, 1. Upon Babylon, here called "*the desert of the sea*," that it should be destroyed by the Medes and Persians with a terrible destruction, which yet God's people should have advantage by, ver. 1-10. 2. Upon Dimash, or Damascus, ver. 11, 12. 3. Upon Arabia, or Kedar, the desolation of which country was very near, ver. 13-17. These and other nations which the princes and people of Israel had so much to do for the prophets of Israel could not but have something to say to. Foreign affairs must be taken notice of as well as domestic ones, and news from abroad enquired after as well as news at home.

THE burden of the desert of the sea. As whirlwinds in the south pass through; so it cometh from the desert, from a terrible land. 2 A grievous vision is declared unto me; the treacherous dealer dealeth treacherously, and the spoiler spoileth. Go up, O Elam: besiege, O Media; all the sighing thereof have I made to cease. 3 Therefore are my loins filled with pain: pangs have taken hold upon me, as the pangs of a woman that travaileth: I was bowed down at the hearing of it; I was dismayed at the seeing of it. 4 My heart panted, fearfulness affrighted me: the night of my pleasure hath he turned into fear unto me. 5 Prepare the table, watch in the watch-tower, eat, drink: arise, ye princes, and anoint the shield. 6 For thus hath the LORD said unto me, Go, set a watchman, let him declare what he seeth. 7 And he saw a chariot *with* a couple of horsemen, a chariot of asses, *and* a chariot of camels; and he hearkened diligently with much heed: 8 And he cried, A lion: My lord, I stand continually upon the watch-tower in the daytime, and I am set in my ward whole nights: 9 And, behold, here cometh a chariot of men, *with* a couple of horsemen. And he answered and said, Babylon is fallen, is fallen; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground. 10 O my threshing, and the corn of my floor: that which I have heard of the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, have I declared unto you.

We had one burden of Babylon before (ch. xiii.); here we have another prediction

of its fall. God saw fit thus to possess his people with the belief of this event by line upon line, because Babylon sometimes pretended to be a friend to them (as *ch. xxxix. 1*), and God would hereby warn them not to trust to that friendship, and sometimes was really an enemy to them. and God would hereby warn them not to be afraid of that enmity. Babylon is marked for ruin; and all that believe God's prophets can, through that glass, see it tottering, see it tumbling, even when with an eye of sense they see it flourishing and sitting as a queen. Babylon is here called the *desert or plain of the sea*; for it was a flat country, and full of lakes, or loughs (as they call them in Ireland), like little seas, and was abundantly watered with the many streams of the river Euphrates. Babylon did but lately begin to be famous, Nineveh having outshone it while the monarchy was in the Assyrian hands; but in a little time it became the lady of kingdoms; and, before it arrived at that pitch of eminency which it was at in Nebuchadnezzar's time, God by this prophet plainly foretold its fall, again and again, that his people might not be terrified at its rise, nor despair of relief in due time when they were its prisoners. *Job v. 3*; *Ps. xxxvii. 35, 36*. Some think it is here called a *desert* because, though it was now a populous city, it should in time be made a desert. And therefore the destruction of Babylon is so often prophesied of by this evangelical prophet, because it was typical of the destruction of the man of sin, the great enemy of the New-Testament church, which is foretold in the *Revelation* in many expressions borrowed from these prophecies, which therefore must be consulted and collated by those who would understand the prophecy of that book. Here is,

I. The powerful irruption and descent which the Medes and Persians should make upon Babylon (*v. 1, 2*): They will come from the desert, from a terrible land. The northern parts of Media and Persia, where their soldiers were mostly bred, was waste and mountainous, terrible to strangers that were to pass through it and producing soldiers that were very formidable. *Elam* (that is, Persia) is summoned to go up against Babylon, and, in conjunction with the forces of Media, to besiege it. When God has work of this kind to do he will find, though it be in a desert, in a terrible land, proper instruments to be employed in it. These forces come as whirlwinds from the south, so suddenly, so strongly, so terribly, such a mighty noise shall they make, and throw down every thing that stands in their way. As is usual in such a case, some deserters will go over to them: *The treacherous dealers will deal treacherously*. Historians tell us of Gadatas and Gobryas, two great officers of the king of Babylon, that went over to Cyrus, and,

being well acquainted with all the avenues of the city, led a party directly to the palace, where Belshazzar was slain. Thus with the help of the treacherous dealers the spoilers spoiled. Some read it thus: *There shall be a deceiver of that deceiver, Babylon, and a spoiler of that spoiler*, or, which comes all to one, *The treacherous dealer has found one that deals treacherously, and the spoiler one that spoils*, as it is expounded, *ch. xxxiii. 1*. The Persians shall pay the Babylonians in their own coin; those that by fraud and violence, cheating and plundering, unrighteous wars and deceitful treaties, have made a prey of their neighbours, shall meet with their match, and by the same methods shall themselves be made a prey of.

II. The different impressions made hereby upon those concerned in Babylon. 1. To the poor oppressed captives it would be welcome news; for they had been told long ago that Babylon's destroyer would be their deliverer, and therefore, "when they hear that Elam and Media are coming up to besiege Babylon, all their sighing will be made to cease; they shall no longer mingle their tears with Euphrates' streams, but resume their harps, and smile when they remember Zion, which, before, they wept at the thought of." For the sighing of the needy the God of pity will arise in due time (*Ps. xii. 5*); he will break the yoke from off their neck, will remove the rod of the wicked from off their lot, and so make their sighing to cease. 2. To the proud oppressors it would be a grievous vision (*v. 2*), particularly to the king of Babylon for the time being, and it should seem that he it is who is here brought in sadly lamenting his inevitable fate (*v. 3, 4*): *Therefore are my loins filled with pain; pangs have taken hold upon me, &c.*, which was literally fulfilled in Belshazzar, for that very night in which his city was taken, and himself slain, upon the sight of a hand writing mystic characters upon the wall his countenance was changed and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed and his knees smote one against another, *Dan. v. 6*. And yet that was but the beginning of sorrows. Daniel's deciphering the writing could not but increase his terror, and the alarm which immediately followed of the executioners at the door would be the completing of it. And those words, *The night of my pleasure has he turned into fear to me*, plainly refer to that aggravating circumstance of Belshazzar's fall that he was slain on that night when he was in the height of his mirth and jollity, with his cups and concubines about him and a thousand of his lords revelling with him; that night of his pleasure, when he promised himself an undisturbed unallayed enjoyment of the most exquisite gratifications of sense, with a particular defiance of God and religion in the profanation of the temple vessels, was the



night that was turned into all this fear. Let this give an effectual check to vain mirth and sensual pleasures, and forbid us ever to lay the reins on the neck of them—that we know not what heaviness the mirth may end in, nor how soon laughter may be turned into mourning; but this we know that for all these things God shall bring us into judgment; let us therefore mix trembling always with our joys.

III. A representation of the posture in which Babylon should be found when the enemy should surprise it—all in festival gaiety (v. 5): “Prepare the table with all manner of dainties. Set the guards; let them watch in the watch-tower while we eat and drink securely and make merry; and, if any alarm should be given, the princes shall arise and anoint the shield, and be in readiness to give the enemy a warm reception.” Thus secure are they, and thus do they gird on the harness with as much joy as if they were putting it off.

IV. A description of the alarm which should be given to Babylon upon its being forced by Cyrus and Darius. The Lord, in vision, showed the prophet the watchman set in his watch-tower, near the palace, as is usual in times of danger; the king ordered those about him to post a sentinel in the most advantageous place for discovery, and, according to the duty of a watchman, let him declare what he sees, v. 6. We read of watchmen thus set to receive intelligence in the story of David (2 Sam. xviii. 24), and in the story of Jehu, 2 Kings ix. 17. This watchman here discovered a chariot with a couple of horsemen attending it, in which we may suppose the commander-in-chief to ride. He then saw another chariot drawn by asses or mules, which were much in use among the Persians, and a chariot drawn by camels, which were likewise much in use among the Medes; so that (as Grotius thinks) these two chariots signify the two nations combined against Babylon, or rather these chariots come to bring tidings to the palace; compare Jer. li. 31, 32. *One post shall run to meet another, and one messenger to meet another, to show the king of Babylon that his city is taken at one end while he is revelling at the other end and knows nothing of the matter.* This watchman, seeing these chariots at some distance, *hearkened diligently with much heed*, to receive the first tidings. And (v. 8) *he cried, A lion*; this word, coming out of a watchman’s mouth, no doubt gave them a certain sound, and every body knew the meaning of it, though we do not know it now. It is likely that it was intended to raise attention: he that has an ear to hear, let him hear, as when a lion roars. Or *he cried as a lion*, very loud and in good earnest, the occasion being very urgent. And what has he to say? 1. He professes his constancy to the post assigned him: “*I stand, my lord, con-*

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*tinually upon the watch-tower*, and have never discovered any thing material till just now; all seemed safe and quiet.” Some make it to be a complaint of the people of God that they had long expected the downfall of Babylon, according to the prophecy, and it had not yet come; but withal a resolution to continue waiting; as Hab. ii. 1, *I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower*, to see what will be the issue of the present providences. 2. He gives notice of the discoveries he had made (v. 9): *Here comes a chariot of men with a couple of horsemen*, a vision representing the enemy’s entry into the city with all their force or the tidings brought to the royal palace of it.

V. A certain account is at length given of the overthrow of Babylon. He in the chariot *answered and said* (when he heard the watchman speak), *Babylon has fallen, has fallen*; or God answered thus to the prophet enquiring concerning the issue of these affairs: “It has now come to this, Babylon has surely and irrecoverably fallen. Babylon’s business is done now. *All the graven images of her gods he has broken unto the ground.*” Babylon was the mother of harlots (that is, of idolatry), which was one of the grounds of God’s quarrel with her; but her idols should now be so far from protecting her that some of them should be broken down to the ground, and others of them, that were worth carrying away, should go into captivity, and be a burden to the beasts that carried them, ch. xlv. 1, 2.

VI. Notice is given to the people of God, who were then captives in Babylon, that this prophecy of the downfall of Babylon was particularly intended for their comfort and encouragement, and they might depend upon it that it should be accomplished in due season, v. 10. Observe,

1. The title the prophet gives them in God’s name: *O my threshing, and the corn of my floor!* The prophet calls them *his*, because they were his countrymen, and such as he had a particular interest in and concern for; but he speaks it as from God, and directs his speech to those that were Israelites indeed, the faithful in the land. Note, (1.) The church is God’s floor, in which the most valuable fruits and products of this earth are, as it were, gathered together and laid up. (2.) True believers are but as the chaff and straw, which take up a great deal of room, but are of small value, with which the wheat is now mixed, but from which it shall be shortly and for ever separated. (3.) The corn of God’s floor must expect to be threshed by afflictions and persecutions. God’s Israel of old was afflicted from her youth, often under the plougher’s plough (Ps. cxxix. 3) and the thresher’s flail. (4.) Even then God owns it for his threshing; it is his still; nay, the

threshing of it is by his appointment, and under his restraint and direction. The threshers could have no power against it *but what was given them from above.*

2. The assurance he gives them of the truth of what he had delivered to them, which therefore they might build their hopes upon: *That which I have heard of the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel—that, and nothing else, that, and no fiction or fancy of my own—have I declared unto you.* Note, In all events concerning the church, past, present, and to come, we must have an eye to God both as the Lord of hosts and as the God of Israel, who has power enough to do any thing for his church and grace enough to do every thing that is for her good, and to the words of his prophets, as words received from the Lord. As they dare not smother any thing which he has entrusted them to declare, so they dare not declare any thing as from him which he has not made known to them, 1 Cor. xi. 23.

11 The burden of Dumah. He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night? 12 The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will inquire, inquire ye: return, come.

This prophecy concerning Dumah is very short, and withal dark and hard to be understood. Some think that Dumah is a part of Arabia, and that the inhabitants descended from Dumah the sixth son of Ishmael, as those of Kedar (v. 16, 17) from Ishmael's second son, Gen. xxv. 13, 14. Others, because Mount Seir is here mentioned, by Dumah understand Idumea, the country of the Edomites. Some of Israel's neighbours are certainly meant, and their distress is foretold, not only for warning to them to prepare them for it, but for warning to Israel not to depend upon them, or any of the nations about them, for relief in a time of danger, but upon God only. We must see all creature confidences failing us, and feel them breaking under us, that we may not lay more weight upon them than they will bear. But though the explication of this prophecy be difficult, because we have no history in which we find the accomplishment of it, yet the application will be easy. We have here,

1. A question put by an Edomite to the watchman. Some one or other *called out of Seir*, somebody that was more concerned for the public safety and welfare than the rest, who were generally careless and secure. As the man of Macedonia, in a vision, desired Paul to come over and help them (Acts xvi. 9), so this man of Mount Seir, in a vision, desired the prophet to inform and instruct them. He calls not many; it

is well there are any, that all are not alike unconcerned about the things that belong to the public peace. Some out of Seir ask advice of God's prophets, and are willing to be taught, when many of God's Israel heed nothing. The question is serious: *What of the night?* It is put to a proper person, the watchman, whose office it is to answer such enquiries. He repeats the question, as one in care, as one in earnest, and desirous to have an answer. Note, (1.) God's prophets and ministers are appointed to be watchmen, and we are to look upon them as such. They are as watchmen in the city in a time of peace, to see that all be safe, to knock at every door by personal enquiries ("Is it locked? Is the fire safe?"), to direct those that are at a loss, and check those that are disorderly, Cant. iii. 3; v. 7. They are as watchmen in the camp in time of war, Ezek. xxxiii. 7. They are to take notice of the motions of the enemy and to give notice of them, to make discoveries and then give warning; and in this they must deny themselves. (2.) It is our duty to enquire of the watchmen, especially to ask again and again, *What of the night?* for watchmen wake when others sleep. [1.] What time of the night? After a long sleep in sin and security, is it not time to rise, high time to awake out of sleep? Rom. xiii. 11. We have a great deal of work to do, a long journey to go; is it not time to be stirring? "Watchman, what o'clock is it? After a long dark night is there any hope of the day dawning?" [2.] What tidings of the night? *What from the night?* (so some); "what vision has the prophet had to-night? We are ready to receive it." Or, rather, "What occurs to night? What weather is it? What news?" We must expect an alarm, and never be secure. *The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night;* we must prepare to receive the alarm, and resolve to keep our ground, and then take the first hint of danger, and to our arms presently, to our spiritual weapons.

2. The watchman's answer to this question. The watchman was neither asleep nor dumb; though it was a man of Mount Seir that called to him, he was ready to give him an answer: *The morning comes.* He answers, (1.) By way of prediction: "There comes first a morning of light, and peace, and opportunity; you will enjoy one day of comfort more; but afterwards comes a night of trouble and calamity." Note, In the course of God's providence it is usual that morning and night are counterchanged and succeed each other. Is it night? Yet the morning comes, and the day-spring knows his place, Ps. xxx. 5. Is it day? Yet the night comes also. If there be a morning of youth and health, there will come a night of sickness and old age; if a morning of prosperity in the family, in the public, yet we must look for changes. But God usually gives a morn-



ing of opportunity before he sends a night of calamity, that his own people may be prepared for the storm and others left inexcusable. (2.) By way of excitement: *If you will enquire, enquire.* Note, It is our wisdom to improve the present morning in preparation for the night that is coming after it. "*Enquire, return, come.* Be inquisitive, be penitent, be willing and obedient." The manner of expression is very observable, for we are put to our choice what we will do: "*If you will enquire, enquire;* if not, it is at your peril; you cannot say but you have a fair offer made you." We are also urged to be at a point: "If you will, say so, and do not stand pausing; what you will do quickly, for it is no time to trifle." Those that return and come to God will find they have a great deal of work to do and but a little time to do it in, and therefore they have need to be busy.

13 The burden upon Arabia. In the forest in Arabia shall ye lodge, O ye travelling companies of Dedanim. 14 The inhabitants of the land of Tema brought water to him that was thirsty, they prevented with their bread him that fled. 15 For they fled from the swords, from the drawn sword, and from the bent bow, and from the grievousness of war. 16 For thus hath the LORD said unto me, Within a year, according to the years of a hireling, and all the glory of Kedar shall fail: 17 And the residue of the number of archers, the mighty men of the children of Kedar, shall be diminished: for the LORD God of Israel hath spoken it.

Arabia was a large country, that lay eastward and southward of the land of Canaan. Much of it was possessed by the posterity of Abraham. The *Dedanim*, here mentioned (v. 13), descended from Dedan, Abraham's son by Keturah; the inhabitants of Tema and Kedar descended from Ishmael, Gen. xxv. 3, 13, 15. The Arabians generally lived in tents, and kept cattle, were a hardy people, inured to labour; probably the Jews depended upon them as a sort of a wall between them and the more warlike eastern nations; and therefore, to alarm them, they shall hear *the burden of Arabia*, and see it sinking under its own burden.

I. A destroying army shall be brought upon them, with a sword, with a drawn sword, with a bow ready bent, and with all the *grievousness of war*, v. 15. It is probable that the king of Assyria, in some of the marches of his formidable and victorious

army, took Arabia in his way, and, meeting with little resistance, made an easy prey of them. The consideration of the grievousness of war should make us thankful for the blessings of peace.

II. The poor country people will hereby be forced to flee for shelter wherever they can find a place; so that *the travelling companies of Dedanim*, which used to keep the high roads with their caravans, shall be obliged to quit them and *lodge in the forest in Arabia* (v. 13), and shall not have the wonted convenience of their own tents, poor and weather-beaten as they are.

III. They shall stand in need of refreshment, being ready to perish for want of it, in their flight from the invading army: "*O you inhabitants of the land of Tema!*" (who probably were next neighbours to the companies of Dedanim) "*bring you water*" (so the margin reads it) "*to him that is thirsty, and prevent with your bread those that flee*, for they are objects of your compassion; they do not wander for wandering sake, nor are they reduced to straits by any extravagance of their own, but *they flee from the sword*." Tema was a country where water was sometimes a scarce commodity (as we find, Job vi. 19), and we may conclude it would be in a particular manner acceptable to these poor distressed refugees. Let us learn hence, 1. To look for distress ourselves. We know not what straits we may be brought into before we die. Those that live in cities may be forced to lodge in forests; and those may know the want of necessary food who now eat bread to the full. Our mountain stands not so strong but that it may be moved, rises not so high but that it may be scaled. These Arabians would the better bear these calamities because in their way of living they had used themselves to hardships. 2. To look with compassion upon those that are in distress, and with all cheerfulness to relieve them, not knowing how soon their case may be ours: "*Bring water to those that are thirsty*, and not only give bread to those that need and ask it, but prevent those with it that have need; give it to them unasked." Those that do so shall find it remembered to their praise, as (according to our reading) it is here remembered to the praise of the land of Tema that they did bring water to the thirsty and relieved even those that were on the falling side.

IV. All that which is the glory of Kedar shall vanish away and fail. Did they glory in their numerous herds and flocks? They shall all be driven away by the enemy. It seems they were famous above other nations for the use of the bow in battle; but their archers, instead of foiling the enemy, shall fall themselves; and *the residue of their number*, when they are reduced to a small number, *shall be diminished* (v. 17); their mighty able-bodied men, and men of spirit

too, shall become very few; for they, being most forward in the defence of their country, were most exposed, and fell first, either by the enemies' sword or into the enemies' hand. Note, Neither the skill of archers (though they be ever so good marksmen) nor the courage of mighty men can protect a people from the judgments of God, when they come with commission; they rather expose the undertakers. That is poor glory which will thus quickly come to nothing.

V. All this shall be done in a little time: *'Within one year according to the years of a hireling* (within one year precisely reckoned) this judgment shall come upon Kedar." If this fixing of the time be of no great use to us now (because we find not either when the prophecy was delivered or when it was accomplished), yet it might be of great use to the Arabians then, to awaken them to repentance, that, like the men of Nineveh, they might prevent the judgment when they were thus told it was just at the door. Or, when it begins to be fulfilled, the business shall be done, be begun and ended in one year's time. God, when he please, can do a great work in a little time.

VI. It is all ratified by the truth of God (v. 16): *"Thus hath the Lord said to me; you may take my word for it that it is his word;"* and we may be sure no word of his shall fall to the ground. And again (v. 17): *The Lord God of Israel hath spoken it,* as the God of Israel, in pursuance of his gracious designs concerning them; and we may be sure *the strength of Israel will not lie.*

## CHAP. XXII.

We have now come nearer home, for this chapter is "the burden of the valley of vision," Jerusalem; other places had their burden for the sake of their being concerned in some way or other with Jerusalem, and were reckoned with either as spiteful enemies or deceitful friends to the people of God; but now let Jerusalem hear her own doom. This chapter concerns, I. The city of Jerusalem itself and the neighbourhood depending upon it. Here is, 1. A prophecy of the grievous distress they should shortly be brought into by Sennacherib's invasion of the country and laying siege to the city, ver. 1-7. 2. A reproof given them for their misconduct in that distress, in two things:—(1.) Not having an eye to God in the use of the means of their preservation, ver. 8-11. (2.) Not humbling themselves under his mighty hand, ver. 12-14. II. The court of Hezekiah, and the officers of that court. 1. The displacing of Shebna, a bad man, and turning him out of the treasury, ver. 15-19, 23. 2. The preferring of Eliakim, who should do his country better service, to his place, ver. 20-24.

**T**HE burden of the valley of vision. What aileth thee now, that thou art wholly gone up to the house-tops? 2 Thou that art full of stirs, a tumultuous city, a joyous city: thy slain men are not slain with the sword, nor dead in battle. 3 All thy rulers are fled together, they are bound by the archers: all that are found in thee are bound together, *which* have fled from far. 4 Therefore said I, Look away from me; I will weep bitterly, labour not to comfort me,

because of the spoiling of the daughter of my people. 5 For *it is* a day of trouble, and of treading down, and of perplexity by the Lord God of hosts in the valley of vision, breaking down the walls, and of crying to the mountains. 6 And Elam bare the quiver with chariots of men and horsemen, and Kir uncovered the shield. 7 And it shall come to pass, *that* thy choicest valleys shall be full of chariots, and the horsemen shall set themselves in array at the gate.

The title of this prophecy is very observable. It is *the burden of the valley of vision*, of Judah and Jerusalem; so all agree. Fitly enough is Jerusalem called a valley, for the mountains were round about it, and the land of Judah abounded with fruitful valleys; and by the judgments of God, though they had been as a towering mountain, they should be brought low, sunk and depressed, and become dark and dirty, as a valley. But most emphatically is it called a *valley of vision* because there God was known and his name was great, there the prophets were made acquainted with his mind by visions, and there the people saw the goings of their God and King in his sanctuary. Babylon, being a stranger to God, though rich and great, was called *the desert of the sea*; but Jerusalem, being entrusted with his oracles, is a *valley of vision*. *Blessed are their eyes, for they see,* and they have seers by office among them. Where Bibles and ministers are there is a valley of vision, from which is expected fruit accordingly; but here is a *burden of the valley of vision*, and a heavy burden it is. Note, Church privileges, if they be not improved, will not secure men from the judgments of God. *You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore will I punish you.* The valley of vision has a particular burden. *Thou Caper-naum*, Matt. xi. 23. The higher any are lifted up in means and mercies the heavier will their doom be if they abuse them.

Now the *burden of the valley of vision* here is that which will not quite ruin it, but only frighten it; for it refers not to the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, but to the attempt made upon it by Sennacherib, which we had the prophecy of, *ch. x.*, and shall meet with the history of, *ch. xxxvi.* It is here again prophesied of, because the desolations of many of the neighbouring countries, which were foretold in the foregoing chapters, were to be brought to pass by the Assyrian army. Now let Jerusalem know that when the cup is going round it will be put into her hand; and, although it will not be to her a fatal cup, yet it will be a cup of trembling. Here is foretold,

I. The consternation that the city should be



in upon the approach of Sennacherib's army. It used to be full of stirs, a city of great trade, people hurrying to and fro about their business, a tumultuous city, populous and noisy. Where there is great trade there is great tumult. It used to be a joyous revelling city. What with the busy part and what with the merry part of mankind, places of concourse are places of noise. "But what ails thee now, that the shops are quitted, and there is no more walking in the streets and exchange, *but thou hast wholly gone up to the house-tops* (v. 1), to bemoan thyself in silence and solitude, or to secure thyself from the enemy, or to look abroad and see if any succours come to thy relief, or which way the enemies' motions are." Let both men of business and sportsmen rejoice *as though they rejoiced not*, for something may happen quickly, which they little think of, that will be a damp to their mirth and a stop to their business, and send them to *watch as a sparrow alone upon the house-top*, Ps. cii. 7. But why is Jerusalem in such a fright? *Her slain men are not slain with the sword* (v. 2), but, 1. Slain with famine (so some); for Sennacherib's army having laid the country waste, and destroyed the fruits of the earth, provisions must needs be very scarce and dear in the city, which would be the death of many of the poorer sort of people, who would be constrained to feed on that which was unwholesome. 2. Slain with fear. They were put into this fright though they had not a man killed, but so disheartened themselves that they seemed as effectually stabbed with fear as if they had been run through with a sword.

II. The inglorious flight of the rulers of Judah, who fled from far, from all parts of the country, to Jerusalem (v. 3), fled together, as it were by consent, and were found in Jerusalem, having left their respective cities, which they should have taken care of, to be a prey to the Assyrian army, which, meeting with no opposition, when it *came up against all the defenced cities of Judah* easily took them, ch. xxxvi. 1. These rulers were bound from the bow (so the word is); they not only quitted their own cities like cowards, but, when they came to Jerusalem, were of no service there, but were as if their hands were tied from the use of the bow, by the extreme distraction and confusion they were in; they trembled, so that they could not draw a bow. See how easily God can dispirit men, and how certainly fear will dispirit them, when the tyranny of it is yielded to.

III. The great grief which this should occasion to all serious sensible people among them, which is represented by the prophet's laying the thing to heart himself; he lived to see it, and was resolved to share with the children of his people in their sorrows, v. 4, 5. He is not willing to proclaim his sorrow, and therefore bids those about him to look away from him; he will abandon himself to

grief, and indulge himself in it, will weep secretly, but weep bitterly, and will have none go about to comfort him, for his grief is obstinate and he is pleased with his pain. But what is the occasion of his grief? A poor prophet had little to lose, and had been inured to hardship, when he walked naked and barefoot; but it is for *the spoiling of the daughter of his people*. Note, Public grievances should be our griefs. It is a *day of trouble, and of treading down, and of perplexity*. Our enemies trouble us and tread us down, and our friends are perplexed and know not what course to take to do us a kindness. The Lord God of hosts is now contending with the valley of vision; the enemies with their battering rams are breaking down the walls, and we are in vain crying to the mountains (to keep off the enemy, or to fall on us and cover us) or looking for help to come to us over the mountains, or appealing, as God does, to the mountains, to hear our controversy (Mic. vi. 1) and to judge between us and our injurious neighbours.

IV. The great numbers and strength of the enemy, that should invade their country and besiege their city, v. 6, 7. Elam (that is, the Persians) come with their quiver full of arrows, and with chariots of fighting men, and horsemen. Kir (that is, the Medes) muster up their arms, unsheath the sword, and uncover the shield, and get every thing ready for battle, every thing ready for the besieging of Jerusalem. Then the choice valleys about Jerusalem, that used to be clothed with flocks and covered over with corn, shall be full of chariots of war, and at the gate of the city *the horsemen shall set themselves in array*, to cut off all provisions from going in, and to force their way in. What a condition must the city be in that was beset on all sides with such an army!

8 And he discovered the covering of Judah, and thou didst look in that day to the armour of the house of the forest. 9 Ye have seen also the breaches of the city of David, that they are many: and ye gathered together the waters of the lower pool. 10 And ye have numbered the houses of Jerusalem, and the houses have ye broken down to fortify the wall. 11 Ye made also a ditch between the two walls for the water of the old pool: but ye have not looked unto the maker thereof, neither had respect unto him that fashioned it long ago. 12 And in that day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth: 13 And behold joy and gladness, slay-

ing oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine: let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we shall die. 14 And it was revealed in mine ears by the Lord of hosts, Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the Lord God of hosts.

What is meant by the covering of Judah, which in the beginning of this paragraph is said to be discovered, is not agreed. The fenced cities of Judah were a covering to the country; but these, being taken by the army of the Assyrians, ceased to be a shelter, so that the whole country lay exposed to be plundered. The weakness of Judah, its nakedness, and inability to keep itself, now appeared more than ever; and thus the covering of Judah was discovered. Its magazines and stores, which had been locked up, were now laid open for the public use. Dr. Lightfoot gives another sense of it, that by this distress into which Judah should be brought God would discover their covering (that is, uncloak their hypocrisy), would show all that was in their heart, as is said of Hezekiah upon another occasion, 2 Chron. xxxii. 31. Now they discovered both their carnal confidence (v. 9) and their carnal security, v. 13. Thus, by one means or other, the iniquity of Ephraim will be discovered and the sin of Samaria, Hos. vii. 1.

They were now in a great fright, and in this fright they manifested two things much amiss:—

I. A great contempt of God's goodness, and his power to help them. They made use of all the means they could think of for their own preservation; and it is not for doing this that they are blamed, but, in doing this, they did not acknowledge God Observe,

1. How careful they were to improve all advantages that might contribute to their safety. When Sennacherib had made himself master of all the defended cities of Judah, and Jerusalem was left as a cottage in a vineyard, they thought it was time to look about them. A council was immediately called, a council of war; and it was resolved to stand upon their defence, and not tamely to surrender. Pursuant to this resolve, they took all the prudent measures they could for their own security. We tempt God if, in times of danger, we do not the best we can for ourselves. (1.) They inspected the magazines and stores, to see if they were well stocked with arms and ammunition: *They looked to the armour of the house of the forest*, which Solomon built in Jerusalem for an armoury (1 Kings x. 17), and thence they delivered out what they had occasion for. It is the wisdom of princes, in time of peace, to provide for war, that they may not have arms to seek when they should use them, and per-

haps upon a sudden emergency. (2.) They viewed the fortifications, the breaches of the city of David; they walked round the walls, and observed where they had gone to decay for want of seasonable repairs, or were broken by some former attempts made upon them. These breaches were many; the more shame for the house of David that they suffered the city of David to lie neglected. They had probably often seen those breaches; but now they saw them to consider what course to take about them. This good we should get by public distresses, we should be awakened by them to repair our breaches, and amend what is amiss. (3.) They made sure of water for the city, and did what they could to deprive the besiegers of it: *You gathered together the water of the lower pool*, of which there was probably no great store, and of which therefore they were the more concerned to be good husbands. See what a mercy it is that, as nothing is more necessary to the support of human life than water, so nothing is more cheap and common; but it is bad indeed when that, as here, is a scarce commodity. (4.) They numbered the houses of Jerusalem, that every house might send in its quota of men for the public service, or contribute in money to it, which they raised by a poll, so much a head or so much a house. (5.) Because private property ought to give way to the public safety, those houses that stood in their way, when the wall was to be fortified, were broken down, which, in such a case of necessity, is no more an injury to the owner than blowing up houses in case of fire. (6.) They made a ditch between the outer and inner wall, for the greater security of the city; and they contrived to draw the water of the old pool to it, that they might have plenty of water themselves and might deprive the besiegers of it; for it seems that was the project, lest the Assyrian army should come and find much water (2 Chron. xxxii. 4) and so should be the better able to prolong the siege. If it be lawful to destroy the forage of a country, much more to divert the streams of its waters, for the straitening and starving of an enemy.

2. How regardless they were of God in all these preparations: *But you have not looked unto the Maker thereof* (that is, of Jerusalem, the city you are so solicitous for the defence of) and of all the advantages which nature has furnished it with for its defence—the mountains round about it (Ps. cxxv. 2) and the rivers, which were such as the inhabitants might turn which way soever they pleased for their convenience. Note, (1.) It is God that made his Jerusalem, and fashioned it long ago, in his counsels. The Jewish writers, upon this place, say, There were seven things which God made before the world (meaning which he had in his eye when he made the world): *the garden of Eden, the law, the just ones, Israel, the throne of glory, Jerusalem, and Messiah the Prince.*



The gospel church has God for its Maker. (2.) Whatever service we do, or endeavour to do, at any time, to God's Jerusalem, must be done with an eye to him as the Maker of it; and he takes it ill if it be done otherwise. It is here charged upon them that they did not look to God. [1.] They did not design his glory in what they did. They fortified Jerusalem because it was a rich city and their own houses were in it, not because it was the holy city and God's house was in it. In all our cares for the defence of the church we must look more at God's interest in it than at our own. [2.] They did not depend upon him for a blessing upon their endeavours, saw no need of it, and therefore sought not to him for it, but thought their own powers and policies sufficient for them. Of Hezekiah himself it is said that *he trusted in God* (2 Kings xviii. 5), and particularly upon this occasion (2 Chron. xxxii. 8); but there were those about him, it seems, who were great statesmen and soldiers, but had little religion in them. [3.] They did not give him thanks for the advantages they had, in fortifying their city, from *the waters of the old pool*, which were fashioned long ago, as Kishon is called *an ancient river*, Judg. v. 21. Whatever in nature is at any time serviceable to us, we must therein acknowledge the goodness of the God of nature, who, when he fashioned it long ago, fitted it to be so, and *according to whose ordinance it continues to this day*. Every creature is that to us which God makes it to be; and therefore, whatever use it is of to us, we must look at him that fashioned it, bless him for it, and use it for him.

II. A great contempt of God's wrath and justice in contending with them, v. 12—14. Here observe,

1. What was God's design in bringing this calamity upon them: it was to humble them, bring them to repentance, and make them serious. In that day of trouble, and treading down, and perplexity, the Lord did thereby *call to weeping and mourning*, and all the expressions of sorrow, even to *baldness and girding with sackcloth*; and all this to lament their sins (by which they had brought those judgments upon their land), to enforce their prayers (by which they might hope to avert the judgments that were breaking in), and to dispose themselves to a reformation of their lives by a holy seriousness and a tenderness of heart under the word of God. To this God called them by his prophets' explaining his providences, and by his providences awakening them to regard what his prophets said. Note, When God threatens us with his judgments he expects and requires that we humble ourselves under his mighty hand, that we tremble when the lion roars, and in a day of adversity consider.

2. How contrary they walked to this design of God (v. 13): *Behold, joy and gladness, mirth and feasting, all the gaiety and*

all the jollity imaginable. They were as secure and cheerful as they used to be, as if they had had no enemy in their borders or were in no danger of falling into his hands. When they had taken the necessary precautions for their security, then they set all deaths and dangers at defiance, and resolved to be merry, let come on them what would. Those that should have been among the mourners were among the *wine-bibbers, the riotous eaters of flesh*; and observe what they said, *Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die*. This may refer either to the particular danger they were now in, and the fair warning which the prophet gave them of it, or to the general shortness and uncertainty of human life, and the nearness of death at all times. This was the language of the profane scoffers who *mocked the messengers of the Lord and misused his prophets*. (1.) They made a jest of dying. "The prophet tells us we must die shortly, perhaps to-morrow, and therefore we should mourn and repent to-day; no, rather *let us eat and drink*, that we may be fattened for the slaughter, and may be in good heart to meet our doom; if we must have a short life, let it be a merry one." (2.) They ridiculed the doctrine of a future state on the other side death; for, if there were no such state, the apostle grants there would be something of reason in what they said, 1 Cor. xv. 32. If, when we die, there were an end of us, it were good to make ourselves as easy and merry as we could while we live; but, if *for all these things God shall bring us into judgment*, it is at our peril if we walk *in the way of our heart and the sight of our eyes*, Eccl. xi. 9. Note, A practical disbelief of another life after this is at the bottom of the carnal security and brutish sensuality which are the sin, and shame, and ruin of so great a part of mankind, as of the old world, who were *eating and drinking till the flood came*.

3. How much God was displeased at it. He signified his resentment of it to the prophet, *revealed it in his ears*, to be by him proclaimed upon the house-top: *Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till you die*, v. 14. It shall never be expiated with sacrifice and offering, any more than the iniquity of the house of Eli, 1 Sam. iii. 14. It is a sin against the remedy, a baffling of the utmost means of conviction and rendering them ineffectual; and therefore it is not likely they should ever repent of it or have it pardoned. The Chaldee reads it, *It shall not be forgiven you till you die the second death*. Those that walk contrary to God shall find that he will walk contrary to them; with the froward he will show himself froward.

15 Thus saith the Lord God of hosts, Go, get thee unto this treasurer, even unto Shebna, which is over the house, and say, 16 What hast thou

here? and whom hast thou here, that thou hast hewed thee out a sepulchre here, *as* he that heweth him out a sepulchre on high, *and* that graveth a habitation for himself in a rock? 17 Behold, the LORD will carry thee away with a mighty captivity, and will surely cover thee. 18 He will surely violently turn and toss thee *like* a ball into a large country: there shalt thou die, and there the chariots of thy glory *shall be* the shame of thy lord's house. 19 And I will drive thee from thy station, and from thy state shall he pull thee down. 20 And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah: 21 And I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand: and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. 22 And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. 23 And I will fasten him *as* a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father's house. 24 And they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the issue, all vessels of small quantity, from the vessels of cups, even to all the vessels of flagons. 25 In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, shall the nail that is fastened in the sure place be removed, and be cut down, and fall; and the burden that *was* upon it shall be cut off: for the LORD hath spoken *it*.

We have here a prophecy concerning the displacing of Shebna, a great officer at court, and the preferring of Eliakim to the post of honour and trust that he was in. Such changes are common in the courts of princes; it is therefore strange that so much notice should be taken of it by the prophet here; but by the accomplishment of what was foretold concerning these particular persons God designed to confirm his word in the mouth of Isaiah concerning other and greater events; and it is likewise to show that, as God has burdens in store for those nations and kingdoms abroad that are open enemies to his church and people, so he has for those par-

ticular persons at home that are false friends to them and betray them. It is likewise a confirmation in general of the hand of divine Providence in all events of this kind, which to us seem contingent and to depend upon the wills and fancies of princes. *Promotion comes not from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south; but God is the Judge*, Ps. lxxv. 6, 7. It is probable that this prophecy was delivered at the same time with that in the former part of the chapter, and began to be fulfilled before Sennacherib's invasion; for now Shebna was *over the house*, but then Eliakim was (*ch. xxxvi. 3*); and Shebna, coming down gradually, was only scribe. Here is,

I. The prophecy of Shebna's disgrace. He is called *this treasurer*, being entrusted with the management of the revenue; and he is likewise said to be *over the house*, for such was his boundless ambition and covetousness that less than two places, and those two of the greatest importance at court, would not satisfy him. It is common for self-seeking men thus to grasp at more than they can manage, and so the business of their places is neglected, while the pomp and profit of them wholly engage the mind. It does not appear what were the particular instances of Shebna's mal-administration, for which Isaiah is here sent to prophesy against him; but the Jews say, "He kept up a traitorous correspondence with the king of Assyria, and was in treaty with him to deliver the city into his hands." However this was, it should seem that he was a foreigner (for we never read of the name of his father) and that he was an enemy to the true interests of Judah and Jerusalem: it is probable that he was first preferred by Ahaz. Hezekiah was himself an excellent prince; but the best masters cannot always be sure of good servants. We have need to pray for princes, that they may be wise and happy in the choice of those they trust. These were times of reformation, yet Shebna, a bad man, complied so far as to keep his places at court; and it is probable that many others did like him, for which reason Sennacherib is said to have been *sent against a hypocritical nation*, *ch. x. 6*. In this message to Shebna we have,

1. A reproof of his pride, vanity, and security (*v. 16*): "*What hast thou here, and whom hast thou here?* What a mighty noise and bustle dost thou make! What estate hast thou here, that thou wast born to? *Whom hast thou here*, what relations, that thou art allied to? Art thou not of mean and obscure original, *filius populi*—a mere plebeian, that comest we know not whence? What is the meaning of this then, that thou hast built thyself a fine house, *hast graved thyself a habitation?*" So very nice and curious was it that it seemed rather to be the work of an engraver than of a mason or carpenter; and it seemed engraven in a rock, so firmly was it founded and so impregnable



was it. "Nay, *thou hast hewed thee out a sepulchre*," as if he designed that his pomp should survive his funeral. Though Jerusalem was not the place of his fathers' sepulchres (as Nehemiah called it with a great deal of tenderness, Neh. ii. 3), he designed it should be the place of his own, and therefore set up a monument for himself in his life-time, set it up on high. Those that make stately monuments for their pride forget that, how beautiful soever they appear outwardly, within *they are full of dead men's bones*. But it is a pity that the grave-stone should forget the grave.

2. A prophecy of his fall and the sullying of his glory. (1.) That he should now quickly be displaced and degraded (v. 19): *I will drive thee from thy station*. High places are slippery places; and those are justly deprived of their honour that are proud of it and puffed up with it, and deprived of their power that do hurt with it. God will do it, who shows himself to be God by looking upon proud men and abasing them, Job xl. 11. 12. To this v. 25 refers. "The nail that is now fastened in the sure place (that is, Shebna, who thinks himself immovably fixed in his office) shall be removed, and cut down, and fall." Those are mistaken who think any place in this world a sure place, or themselves as nails fastened in it; for there is nothing here but uncertainty. When the nail falls the burden that was upon it is cut off; when Shebna was disgraced all that had a dependence upon him fell into contempt too. Those that are in high places will have many hanging upon them as favourites whom they are proud of and trust to; but they are burdens upon them, and perhaps with their weight break the nail, and both fall together, and by deceiving ruin one another—the common fate of great men and their flatterers, who expect more from each other than either performs. (2.) That after a while he should not only be driven from his station, but driven from his country: *The Lord will carry thee away with the captivity of a mighty man*, v. 17, 18. Some think the Assyrians seized him, and took him away, because he had promised to assist them and did not, but appeared against them: or perhaps Hezekiah, finding out his treachery, banished him, and forbade him ever to return; or he himself, finding that he had become obnoxious to the people, withdrew into some other country, and there spent the rest of his days in meanness and obscurity. Grotius thinks he was stricken with a leprosy, which was a disease commonly supposed to come from the immediate hand of God's displeasure, particularly for the punishment of the proud, as in the case of Miriam and Uzziah; and by reason of this disease he was tossed like a ball out of Jerusalem. Those who, when they are in power, turn and toss others, will be justly turned and tossed themselves when their day shall come to fall. Many

who have thought themselves fastened like a nail may come to be tossed like a ball; for here have we no continuing city. Shebna thought his place too strait for him, he had no room to thrive; God will therefore send him into a large country, where he shall have room to wander, but never find the way back again; for *there he shall die*, and lay his bones there, and not in the sepulchre he had hewn out for himself. And *there the chariots* which had been the chariots of his glory, in which he had rattled about the streets of Jerusalem, and which he took into banishment with him, should but serve to upbraid him with his former grandeur, to the shame of his lord's house, of the court of Ahaz, who had advanced him.

II. The prophecy of Eliakim's advancement, v. 20, &c. He is God's servant, has approved himself faithfully so in other employments, and therefore God will call him to this high station. Those that are diligent in doing the duty of a low sphere stand fairest for preferment in God's books. Eliakim does not undermine Shebna, nor make an interest against him, nor does he intrude into his office; but God calls him to it: and what God calls us to we may expect he will own us in. It is here foretold, 1. That Eliakim should be put into Shebna's place of lord-chamberlain of the household, lord-treasurer, and prime-minister of state. The prophet must tell Shebna this, v. 21. "He shall have *thy robe*, the badge of honour, and *thy girdle*, the badge of power; for he shall have *thy government*." To hear of it would be a great mortification to Shebna, much more to see it. Great men, especially if proud men, cannot endure their successors. God undertakes the doing of it, not only because he would put it into the heart of Hezekiah to do it, and his hand must be acknowledged guiding the hearts of princes in placing and displacing men (Prov. xxi. 1), but because the powers that are, subordinate as well as supreme, are ordained of God. It is God that clothes princes with their robes, and therefore we must submit ourselves to them for the Lord's sake and with an eye to him, 1 Pet. ii. 13. And, since it is he that commits the government into their hand, they must administer it according to his will, for his glory; they must judge for him by whom they judge and decree justice, Prov. viii. 15. And they may depend upon him to furnish them for what he calls them to, according to this promise: *I will clothe him*; and then it follows, *I will strengthen him*. Those that are called to places of trust and power should seek unto God for grace to enable them to do the duty of their places; for that ought to be their chief care. Eliakim's advancement is further described by the laying of the key of the house of David upon his shoulders, v. 22. Probably he carried a golden key upon his shoulder as a badge of his office, or had one embroidered upon his cloak or

robe, to which this alludes. Being over the house, and having the key delivered to him, as the seals are to the lord-keeper, *he shall open and none shall shut, shut and none shall open.* He had access to the house of the precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices; and to the house of the armour and the treasures (ch. xxxix. 2), and disposed of the stores there as he thought fit for the public service. He put whom he pleased into the inferior offices and turned out whom he pleased. Our Lord Jesus describes his own power as Mediator by an allusion to this (Rev. iii. 7), that *he has the key of David*, wherewith he opens and no man shuts, he shuts and no man opens. His power in the kingdom of heaven, and in the ordering of all the affairs of that kingdom, is absolute, irresistible, and uncontrollable. 2. That he should be fixed and confirmed in that office. He shall have it for life, and not *durante bene placito—during pleasure* (v. 23): *I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place*, not to be removed or cut down. Thus lasting shall the honour be that comes from God to all those who use it for him. Our Lord Jesus is *as a nail in a sure place*: his kingdom cannot be shaken, and he himself is still the same. 3. That he should be a great blessing in his office; and it is this that crowns the favours here conferred upon him. *God makes his name great*, for he shall be a blessing, Gen. xii. 2. (1.) He shall be a blessing to his country (v. 21): *He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah.* He shall take care not only of the affairs of the king's household, but of all the public interests in Jerusalem and Judah. Note, Rulers should be fathers to those that are under their government, to teach them with wisdom, rule them with love, and correct what is amiss with tenderness, to protect them and provide for them, and be solicitous about them as a man is for his own children and family. It is happy with a people when the court, the city, and the country, have no separate interests, but all centre in the same, so that the courtiers are true patriots, and whom the court blesses the country has reason to bless too; and when those who are fathers to Jerusalem, the royal city, are no less so to the house of Judah. (2.) He shall be a blessing to his family (v. 23, 24): *He shall be for a glorious throne to his father's house.* The consummate wisdom and virtue which recommended him to this great trust made him the honour of his family, which probably was very considerable before, but now became much more so. Children should aim to be a credit to their parents and relations. The honour men reflect upon their families by their piety and usefulness is more to be valued than that which they derive from their families by their names and titles. Eliakim being preferred, *all the glory of his father's house* was hung upon him; they all made their court to him, and his brethren's sheaves

bowed to his. Observe, The glory of this world gives a man no intrinsic worth or excellency; it is but hung upon him as an apurtenance, and it will soon drop from him. Eliakim was compared to *a nail in a sure place*, in pursuance of which comparison all the relations of his family (which, it is likely, were numerous, and that was the glory of it) are said to have a dependence upon him, as in a house the vessels that have handles to them are hung up upon nails and pins. It intimates likewise that he shall generously take care of them all, and bear the weight of that care: *All the vessels, not only the flagons, but the cups, the vessels of small quantity*, the meanest that belong to his family, shall be provided for by him. See what a burden those bring upon themselves that undertake great trusts; they little think how many and how much will hang upon them if they resolve to be faithful in the discharge of their trust. Our Lord Jesus, having the key of the house of David, is *as a nail in a sure place*, and all the glory of his father's house hangs upon him, is derived from him, and depends upon him; even the meanest that belong to his church are welcome to him, and he is able to bear the stress of them all. That soul cannot perish, nor that concern fall to the ground, though ever so weighty, that is by faith hung upon Christ.

## CHAP. XXIII.

This chapter is concerning Tyre, an ancient wealthy city, situated upon the sea, and for many ages one of the most celebrated cities for trade and merchandise in those parts of the world. The lot of the tribe of Asher bordered upon it. See Joshua xix. 29, where it is called "the strong city Tyre." We seldom find it a dangerous enemy to Israel, but sometimes their faithful ally, as in the reigns of David and Solomon; for trading cities maintain their grandeur, not by the conquest of their neighbours, but by commerce with them. In this chapter is foretold, 1. The lamentable desolation of Tyre, which was performed by Nebuchadnezzar and the Chaldean army, about the time that they destroyed Jerusalem; and a hard task they had of it, as appears Ezek. xxix. 18, where they are said to have "served a hard service against Tyre," and yet to have no wages, ver. 1—14. 2. The restoration of Tyre after seventy years, and the return of the Tyrians out of their captivity to their trade again, ver. 15—18.

**T**HE burden of Tyre. Howl, ye ships of Tarshish; for it is laid waste, so that there is no house, no entering in: from the land of Chittim it is revealed to them. 2 Be still, ye inhabitants of the isle; thou whom the merchants of Zidon, that pass over the sea, have replenished. 3 And by great waters the seed of Sihor, the harvest of the river, is her revenue; and she is a mart of nations. 4 Be thou ashamed, O Zidon: for the sea hath spoken, *even* the strength of the sea, saying, I travail not, nor bring forth children, neither do I nourish up young men, *nor* bring up virgins. 5 As at the report concerning Egypt, so shall they be sorely pained



at the report of Tyre. 6 Pass ye over to Tarshish; howl, ye inhabitants of the isle. 7 Is this your joyous city, whose antiquity is of ancient days? Her own feet shall carry her afar off to sojourn. 8 Who hath taken this counsel against Tyre, the crowning city, whose merchants are princes, whose traffickers are the honourable of the earth? 9 The LORD of hosts hath purposed it, to stain the pride of all glory, and to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth. 10 Pass through thy land as a river, O daughter of Tarshish: there is no more strength. 11 He stretched out his hand over the sea, he shook the kingdoms: the LORD hath given a commandment against the merchant city, to destroy the strong holds thereof. 12 And he said, Thou shalt no more rejoice, O thou oppressed virgin, daughter of Zidon: arise, pass over to Chittim; there also shalt thou have no rest. 13 Behold the land of the Chaldeans; this people was not, till the Assyrian founded it for them that dwell in the wilderness: they set up the towers thereof, they raised up the palaces thereof; and he brought it to ruin. 14 Howl, ye ships of Tarshish: for your strength is laid waste.

Tyre being a sea-port town, this prophecy of its overthrow fitly begins and ends with, *Howl, you ships of Tarshish*; for all its business, wealth, and honour, depended upon its shipping; if that be ruined, they will be all undone. Observe,

I. Tyre flourishing. This is taken notice of that her fall may appear the more dismal. 1. *The merchants of Zidon*, who traded at sea, had at first replenished her, v. 2. Zidon was the more ancient city, situated upon the same sea-coast, a few leagues more to the north, and Tyre was at first only a colony of that; but the daughter had outgrown the mother, and become much more considerable. It may be a mortification to great cities to think how they were at first replenished. 2. Egypt had helped very much to raise her, v. 3. Sihor was the river of Egypt: by that river, and the ocean into which it ran, the Egyptians traded with Tyre; and the harvest of that river was her revenue. The riches of the sea, and the gains by goods exported and imported, are as much the harvest to trading towns as that of hay and corn is to the country; and sometimes the harvest of the river proves a

better revenue than the harvest of the land. Or it may be meant of all the products of the Egyptian soil, which the men of Tyre traded in, and which were the harvest of the river Nile, owing themselves to the overflowing of that river. 3. She had become the mart of the nations, the great emporium of that part of the world. Some of every known nation might be found there, especially at certain times of the year, when there was a general rendezvous of merchants. This is enlarged upon by another prophet, Ezek. xxvii. 2, 3, &c. See how the hand of the diligent, by the blessing of God upon it, makes rich. Tyre became rich and great by industry, though she had no other ploughs going than those that plough the waters. 4. She was a joyous city, noted for mirth and jollity, v. 7. Those that were so disposed might find there all manner of sports and diversions, all the delights of the sons and daughters of men, balls, and plays, and operas, and every thing of that kind that a man had a fancy to. This made them secure and proud, and they despised the country people, who neither knew nor relished any joys of that nature. This also made them very loth to believe and consider what warnings God gave them by his servants; they were too merry to mind them. Her antiquity likewise was of ancient days, and she was proud of that, and that helped to make her secure; as if because she had been a city time out of mind, and her antiquity had been of ancient days, therefore she must continue a city time without end, and her continuance must be to the days of eternity. 5. She was a crowning city (v. 8), that crowned herself. Such were the power and pomp of her magistrates that they crowned those who had dependence on her and dealings with her. It is explained in the following words: *Her merchants are princes*, and live like princes for the ease and state they take; and *her traffickers*, whatever country they go to, are the honourable of the earth, who are respected by all. How slightly soever some now speak of tradesmen, it seems formerly, and among the wisest nations, there were merchants, and traders, and men of business, that were the honourable of the earth.

II. Here is Tyre falling. It does not appear that she brought trouble upon herself by provoking her neighbours with her quarrels, but rather by tempting them with her wealth; but, if it was this that induced Nebuchadnezzar to fall upon Tyre, he was disappointed; for after it had stood out a siege of thirteen years, and could hold out no longer, the inhabitants got away by sea, with their families and goods, to other places where they had an interest, and left Nebuchadnezzar nothing but the bare city. See a history of Tyre in Sir Walter Raleigh's History of the World, lib. ii. cap. 7. sect. 3, 43. pag. 283, which will give much light

to this prophecy and that in Ezekiel concerning Tyre.

1. See how the destruction of Tyre is here foretold. (1.) The haven shall be spoiled, or at least neglected. There shall be no convenient harbour for the reception of the ships of Tarshish, but all *laid waste* (v. 1), so that there shall be no house, no dock for the ships to ride in, no inns, or public houses for the seamen, no entering into the port. Perhaps it was choked with sand or blocked up by the enemy. Or, Tyre being destroyed and laid waste, the ships that used to come from Tarshish and Chittim into that port shall now no more enter in; for *it is revealed* or made known to them, they have received the dismal news, that Tyre is destroyed and laid waste; so that there is now no more business for them there. See how it is in this world; those that are spoiled by their enemies are commonly slighted by their old friends. (2.) The inhabitants are struck with astonishment. Tyre was an island. The inhabitants of it, who had made a mighty noise and bustle in the world, and revelled with loud huzzas, shall now be still and silent (v. 2); they shall sit down as mourners, so overwhelmed with grief that they shall not be able to express it. Their proud boasts of themselves, and defiance of their neighbours, shall be silenced. God can soon quiet those, and strike them dumb, that are the noisy busy people of the world. Be still; for God will do his work (Ps. xli. 10; Zech. ii. 13), and you cannot resist him. (3.) The neighbours are amazed, blush, and are in pain for them: *Zidon is ashamed* (v. 4), by whom Tyre was at first replenished; for the rolling waves of the sea brought to Zidon this news from Tyre; and there *the strength of the sea*, a high spring-tide, proclaimed saying, "*I travail not, nor bring forth children* now, as I have done. I do not now, as I used to do, bring ship-loads of young people to Tyre, to be bred up there in trade and business," which was the thing that had made Tyre so rich and populous. Or the sea, that used to be loaded with fleets of ships about Tyre, shall now be as desolate as a sorrowful widow that is bereaved of all her children, and has none about her to nourish and bring up. Egypt indeed was a much larger and more considerable kingdom than Tyre was; and yet Tyre had so large a correspondence, upon the account of trade, that all the nations about shall be as much in pain, upon the report of the ruin of that one city, as they would have been, and not long after were, upon the report of the ruin of all Egypt, v. 5. Or, as some read it, *When the report shall reach to the Egyptians they shall be sorely pained to hear it of Tyre*, both because of the loss of their trade with that city and because it was a threatening step towards their own ruin; when their neighbour's house was on fire their own was in danger.

(4.) The merchants, as many as could, should transmit their effects to other places, and abandon Tyre, where they had raised their estates, and thought they had made them sure (v. 6): "*You that have long been inhabitants of this isle*" (for it lay off in the sea about half a mile from the continent); "*it is time to howl now, for you must pass over to Tarshish.* The best course you can take is to make the best of your way to Tarshish, to the sea" (to Tartessus, a city in Spain; so some), "or to some other of your plantations." Those that think their mountain stands strong, and cannot be moved, will find that here they have no continuing city. *The mountains shall depart and the hills be removed.* (5.) Those that could not make their escape must expect no other than to be carried into captivity; for it was the way of conquerors, in those times, to take those they conquered to be bondmen in their own country, and send of their own to be freemen in theirs (v. 7): *Her own feet shall carry her afar off to sojourn*; they shall be hurried away on foot into captivity, and many a weary step they shall take towards their own misery. Those that have lived in the greatest pomp and splendour know not what hardships they may be reduced to before they die. (6.) Many of those that attempted to escape should be pursued and fall into the hands of the enemy. Tyre shall *pass through her land as a river* (v. 10), running down, one company after another, into the ocean or abyss of misery. Or, though they hasten away as a river, with the greatest swiftness, hoping to outrun the danger, yet *there is no more strength*; they are quickly tired, and cannot get forward, but fall an easy prey into the hands of the enemy. And, as Tyre has no more strength, so her sister Zidon has no more comfort (v. 12): "*Thou shalt no more rejoice, O oppressed virgin, daughter of Zidon*, that art now ready to be overpowered by the victorious Chaldeans! Thy turn is next; therefore *arise; pass over to Chittim*; flee to Greece, to Italy, any where to shift for thy own safety; yet *there also shalt thou have no rest*; thy enemies shall disturb thee, and thy own fears shall disquiet thee, where thou hopedst to find some repose." Note, We deceive ourselves if we promise ourselves rest any where in this world. Those that are uneasy in one place will be so in another; and, when God's judgments pursue sinners, they will overtake them.

2. But whence shall all this trouble come?

(1.) God will be the author of it; it is a *destruction from the Almighty*. It will be asked (v. 8), "*Who has taken this counsel against Tyre?*" Who has contrived it? Who has resolved it? Who can find in his heart to lay such a stately lovely city in ruins? And how is it possible that its ruin should be effected?" To this it will be answered, [1.] God has designed it, who is infinitely wise and just, and never did, nor ever will



do, any wrong to any of his creatures (v. 9). *The Lord of hosts*, that has all things at his disposal and gives not account of any of his matters, he *has purposed it*. It shall be done according to the counsel of his will; and that which he aims at herein is *to stain the pride of all glory*, to pollute it, profane it, and throw it to be trodden upon; *and to bring into contempt* and make despicable *all the honourable ones of the earth*, that they may not admire themselves and be admired by others as usual. God did not bring those calamities upon Tyre in a way of sovereignty, to show an arbitrary and irresistible power; but he did it to punish the Tyrians for their pride. Many other sins, no doubt, reigned among them—idolatry, sensuality, and oppression; but the sin of pride is fastened upon as that which was the particular ground of God's controversy with Tyre; for he resists the proud. All the world observing and being surprised at the desolation of Tyre, we have here an exposition of it. God tells the world what he meant by it. *First*, He designed to convince men of the vanity and uncertainty of all earthly glory, to show them what a withering, fading, perishing thing it is even when it seems most substantial. It were well if men would be thoroughly taught this lesson, though it were at the expense of so great a destruction. Are men's learning and wealth, their pomp and power, their interest in, and influence upon, all about them, their glory? Are their stately houses, rich furniture, and splendid appearances, their glory? Look upon the ruins of Tyre, and see all this glory stained, and sullied, and buried in the dust. The honourable ones of heaven will be for ever such; but see the grandees of Tyre, some fled into banishment, others forced into captivity, and all impoverished, and you will conclude that the honourable of the earth, even the most honourable, know not how soon they may be brought into contempt. *Secondly*, He designed hereby to prevent their being proud of that glory, their being puffed up, and confident of the continuance of it. Let the ruin of Tyre be a warning to all places and persons to take heed of pride; for it proclaims to all the world that he who exalts himself shall be abased. [2.] God will do it, who has all power in his hand and can do it effectually (v. 11): *He stretched out his hand over the sea*. He has done so many a time, witness the dividing of the Red Sea and the drowning of Pharaoh in it. He has often shaken the kingdoms that were most secure; and he has now given commandment concerning this merchant-city, to destroy the strongholds thereof. As its beauty shall not intercede for it, but that shall be stained, so its strength shall not protect it, but that shall be broken. If any think it strange that a city so well fortified, and that has so many powerful allies, should be so totally

ruined, let them know that it is the Lord of hosts that has given a commandment to destroy the strongholds thereof: and who can gainsay his orders or hinder the execution of them?

(2.) The Chaldeans shall be the instruments of it (v. 13): *Behold the land of the Chaldeans*; how easily they and their land were destroyed by the Assyrians. Though their own hands *founded it, set up the towers of Babylon, and raised up its palaces*, yet the Assyrians brought it to ruin, whence the Tyrians might infer that as easily as the old Chaldeans were subdued by the Assyrians so easily shall Tyre be vanquished by those new Chaldeans. Babel was built by the Assyrians *for those that dwell in the wilderness*. It may be rendered *for the ships* (the Assyrians founded it for ships and shipmen that traffic upon those vast rivers Tigris and Euphrates to the Persian and Indian seas), *for men of the desert*, for Babylon is called *the desert of the sea*, ch. xxi. 1. Thus Tyrus was built upon the sea for the like purpose. But the Assyrians (says Dr. Lightfoot) brought that to ruin, now lately, in Hezekiah's time, and so shall Tyre hereafter be brought to ruin by Nebuchadnezzar. If we looked more upon the falling and withering of others, we should not be so confident as we commonly are of the continuance of our own flourishing and standing.

15 And it shall come to pass in that day, that Tyre shall be forgotten seventy years, according to the days of one king: after the end of seventy years shall Tyre sing as a harlot. 16 Take a harp, go about the city, thou harlot that hast been forgotten; make sweet melody, sing many songs, that thou mayest be remembered. 17 And it shall come to pass after the end of seventy years, that the LORD will visit Tyre, and she shall turn to her hire, and shall commit fornication with all the kingdoms of the world upon the face of the earth. 18 And her merchandise and her hire shall be holiness to the LORD: it shall not be treasured nor laid up; for her merchandise shall be for them that dwell before the LORD, to eat sufficiently, and for durable clothing.

Here is, I. The time fixed for the continuance of the desolations of Tyre, which were not to be perpetual desolations: *Tyre shall be forgotten seventy years*, v. 15. So long it shall lie neglected and buried in obscurity. It was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar much about the time that Jerusalem was, and lay as long as it did in its ruins. See the folly of that proud ambitious conqueror.

What the richer, what the stronger, was he for making himself master of Tyre, when all the inhabitants were driven out of it and he had none of his own subjects to spare for the replenishing and fortifying of it? It is surprising to see what pleasure men could take in destroying cities and making *their memorial perish with them*, Ps. ix. 6. He trampled on the pride of Tyre, and therein served God's purpose; but with greater pride, for which God soon after humbled him.

II. A prophecy of the restoration of Tyre to its glory again: *After the end of seventy years, according to the years of one king, or one dynasty or family of kings, that of Nebuchadnezzar; when that expired, the desolations of Tyre came to an end. And we may presume that Cyrus at the same time when he released the Jews, and encouraged them to rebuild Jerusalem, released the Tyrians also, and encouraged them to rebuild Tyre.* Thus the prosperity and adversity of places, as well as persons, are *set the one over against the other*, that the most glorious cities may not be secure nor the most ruinous despair. It is foretold, 1. That God's providence shall again smile upon this ruined city (v. 17): *The Lord will visit Tyre in mercy; for, though he contend, he will not contend for ever. It is not said, Her old acquaintance shall visit her, the colonies she has planted, and the trading cities she has had correspondence with (they have forgotten her); but, The Lord shall visit her by some unthought-of turn; he shall cause his indignation towards her to cease, and then things will run of course in their former channel.* 2. That she shall use her best endeavours to recover her trade again. She shall sing as a harlot, that has been some time under correction for her lewdness; but, when she is set at liberty (so violent is the bent of corruption), she will use her old arts of temptation. The Tyrians having returned from their captivity, and those that remained recovering new spirits thereupon, they shall contrive how to force a trade, shall procure the best choice of goods, under-sell their neighbours, and be obliging to all customers; as a harlot that has been forgotten, when she comes to be spoken of again, recommends herself to company by singing and playing, *takes a harp, goes about the city, perhaps in the night, serenading, makes sweet melody, and sings many songs.* These are innocent and allowable diversions, if soberly, and moderately, and modestly used; but those that value themselves upon their virtue should not be over-fond of them, nor ambitious to excel in them, because, whatever they are now, anciently they were some of the baits with which harlots used to entice fools. Tyre shall now by degrees come to be the mart of nations again; she shall *return to her hire, to her traffic, and shall commit fornication* (that is, she shall have dealings in trade, for the prophet carries on the similitude of a harlot)

*with all the kingdoms of the world that she had formerly traded with in her prosperity.* The love of worldly wealth is a spiritual whoredom, and therefore covetous people are called *adulterers and adulteresses* (James iv. 4), and covetousness is spiritual idolatry. 3. That, having recovered her trade again, she shall make a better use of it than she had done formerly; and this good she should get by her calamities (v. 18): *Her merchandise, and her hire, shall be holiness to the Lord.* The trade of Tyre, and all the gains of her trade, shall be devoted to God and to his honour and employed in his service. It shall not be treasured and hoarded up, as formerly, to be the matter of their pride and the support of their carnal confidence; but it shall be laid out in acts of piety and charity. What they can spare from the maintenance of themselves and their families *shall be for those that dwell before the Lord*, for the priests, the Lord's ministers, that attend in his temple at Jerusalem; not to maintain them in pomp and grandeur, but that they and theirs may *eat sufficiently*, may have food convenient for them, with as little as may be of that care which would divert them from their ministration, and that they may have, not rich and fine clothing, but *durable clothing*, that which is strong and lasting, *clothing for old men* (so some read it), as if the priests, though they were young, must wear such plain grave clothing as old men used to wear. Now, (1.) This supposes that religion should be set up in New Tyre, that they should come to the knowledge of the true God and into communion with the Israel of God. Perhaps their being fellow-captives with the Jews in Babylon (who had prophets with them there) disposed them to join with them in their worship there, and turned them from idols, as it cured the Jews of their idolatry, and when they were released with them, and as they had reason to believe for their sakes, when they were settled again in Tyre, they would send gifts and offerings to the temple, and presents to the priests. We find men of Tyre then dwelling in the land of Judah, Neh. xiii. 16. Tyre and Sidon were better disposed to religion in Christ's time than the cities of Israel; for, if Christ had gone among them, *they would have repented*, Matt. xi. 21. And we meet with Christians at Tyre (Acts xxi. 3, 4), and, many years after, did Christianity flourish there. Some of the rabbins refer this prophecy of the conversion of Tyre to the days of the Messiah. (2.) It directs those that have estates to make use of them in the service of God and religion, and to reckon that best laid up which is so laid out. Both the merchandise of the tradesmen and the hire of the day-labourers shall be devoted to God. Both the merchandise (the employment we follow) and the hire (the gain of our employments) must be *holiness to the Lord*, alluding to the motto engraven on the frontlet of the



high priest (Exod. xxxix. 30), and to the separation of the tithe under the law, Lev. xxvii. 30. See a promise like this referring to gospel times, Zech. xiv. 20, 21. We must first give up ourselves to be holiness to the Lord before what we do, or have, or get, can be so. When we abide with God in our particular callings, and do common actions after a godly sort—when we abound in works of piety and charity, are liberal in relieving the poor, and supporting the ministry, and encouraging the gospel—then our merchandise and our hire are holiness to the Lord, if we sincerely look at his glory in them. And our wealth need not be treasured and laid up on earth; for it is treasured and laid up in heaven, in *bags that wax not old*, Luke xii. 33.

## CHAP. XXIV.

It is agreed that here begins a new sermon, which is continued to the end of chap. xxvii. And in it the prophet, according to the directions he had received, does, in many precious promises, "say to the righteous, It shall be well with them;" and, in many dreadful threatenings, he says, "Woe to the wicked, it shall be ill with them" (ch. iii. 10, 11); and these are interwoven, that they may illustrate each other. This chapter is mostly threatening; and, as the judgments threatened are very sore and grievous ones, so the people threatened with those judgments are very many. It is not the burden of any particular city or kingdom, as those before, but the burden of the whole earth. The word indeed signifies only the land, because our own land is commonly to us as all the earth. But it is here explained by another word that is not so confined; it is the world (ver. 4); so that it must at least take in a whole neighbourhood of nations. 1. Some think (and very probably) that it is a prophecy of the great havoc that Sennacherib and his Assyrian army should now shortly make of many of the nations in that part of the world. 2. Others make it to point at the like devastations which, about 100 years afterwards, Nebuchadnezzar and his armies should make in the same countries, going from one kingdom to another, not only to conquer them, but to ruin them and lay them waste; for that was the method which those eastern nations took in their wars. The promises that are mixed with the threatenings are intended for the support and comfort of the people of God in those very calamitous times. And, since here are no particular nations named either by whom or on whom those desolations should be brought, I see not but it may refer to both those events. Nay, the scripture has many fulfillings, and we ought to give it its full latitude; and therefore I incline to think that the prophet, from those and the like instances which he had a particular eye to, designs here to represent in general the calamitous state of mankind, and the many miseries which human life is liable to, especially those that attend the wars of the nations. Surely the prophets were sent, not only to foretell particular events, but to form the minds of men to virtue and piety, and for that end their prophecies were written and preserved even for our learning, and therefore ought not to be looked upon as of private interpretation. Now since a thorough conviction of the vanity of the world, and its insufficiency to make us happy, will go far towards bringing us to God, and drawing out our affections towards another world, the prophet here shows what vexation of spirit we must expect to meet with in these things, that we may never take up our rest in them, nor promise ourselves satisfaction any where short of the enjoyment of God. In this chapter we have, I. A threatening of desolating judgments for sin (ver. 1—12), to which is added an assurance that in the midst of them good people should be comforted, ver. 13—15. II. A further threatening of the like desolations (ver. 16—22), to which is added an assurance that in the midst of all God should be glorified.

**B**EHOLD, the LORD maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof. 2 And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest; as with the servant, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the taker of usury, so

with the giver of usury to him. 3 The land shall be utterly emptied, and utterly spoiled: for the LORD hath spoken this word. 4 The earth mourneth and fadeth away, the world languisheth and fadeth away, the haughty people of the earth do languish. 5 The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. 6 Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left. 7 The new wine mourneth, the vine languisheth, all the merry-hearted do sigh. 8 The mirth of tabrets ceaseth, the noise of them that rejoice endeth, the joy of the harp ceaseth. 9 They shall not drink wine with a song; strong drink shall be bitter to them that drink it. 10 The city of confusion is broken down: every house is shut up, that no man may come in. 11 There is a crying for wine in the streets; all joy is darkened, the mirth of the land is gone. 12 In the city is left desolation, and the gate is smitten with destruction.

It is a very dark and melancholy scene that this prophecy presents to our view; turn our eyes which way we will, every thing looks dismal. The threatened desolations are here described in a great variety of expressions to the same purport, and all aggravating.

I. The earth is stripped of all its ornaments and looks as if it were taken off its basis; it is made *empty and waste* (v. 1), as if it were reduced to its first chaos, *Tohu* and *Bohu*, nothing but confusion and emptiness again (Gen. i. 2), *without form and void*. It is true earth sometimes signifies the *land*, and so the same word *eretz* is here translated (v. 3): *The land shall be utterly emptied and utterly spoiled*; but I see not why it should not there, as well as v. 1, be translated *the earth*; for most commonly, if not always, where it signifies some one particular land it has something joined to it, or at least not far from it, which does so appropriate it; as the land (or earth) of Egypt, or Canaan, or this land, or ours, or yours, or the like. It might indeed refer to some particular country, and an ambiguous word might be used to warrant such an application; for it is good to apply to ourselves, and our own lands, what

the scripture says in general of the vanity and vexation of spirit that attend all things here below; but it should seem designed to speak what often happens to many countries, and will do while the world stands, and what may, we know not how soon, happen to our own, and what is the general character of all earthly things: they are empty of all solid comfort and satisfaction; a little thing makes them waste. We often see numerous families, and plentiful estates, utterly emptied and utterly spoiled, by one judgment or other, or perhaps only by a gradual and insensible decay. Sin has turned the earth *upside down*; the earth has become quite a different thing to man from what it was when God made it to be his habitation. Sin has also *scattered abroad the inhabitants thereof*. The rebellion at Babel was the occasion of the dispersion there. How many ways are there in which the inhabitants both of towns and of private houses are scattered abroad, so that near relations and old neighbours know nothing of one another! To the same purport is v. 4: *The earth mourns, and fades away*; it disappoints those that placed their happiness in it and raised their expectations high from it, and proves not what they promised themselves it would be. *The whole world languishes and fades away*, as hastening towards a dissolution. It is, at the best, like a flower, which withers in the hands of those that please themselves too much with it, and lay it in their bosoms. And, as the earth itself grows old, so those that dwell therein are desolate; men carry crazy sickly bodies along with them, are often solitary, and confined by affliction, v. 6. When the earth languishes, and is not so fruitful as it used to be, then those that dwell therein, that make it their home, and rest, and portion, are desolate; whereas those that by faith dwell in God can rejoice in him even when the fig-tree does not blossom. If we look abroad, and see in how many places pestilences and burning fevers rage, and what multitudes are swept away by them in a little time, so that sometimes the living scarcely suffice to bury the dead, perhaps we shall understand what the prophet means when he says, *The inhabitants of the earth are burned*, or consumed, some by one disease, others by another, and there are but *few men left*, in comparison. Note, The world we live in is a world of disappointment, a vale of tears, and a dying world; and the children of men in it are but of few days, and full of trouble.

II. It is God that brings all these calamities upon the earth. *The Lord* that made the earth, and made it fruitful and beautiful, for the service and comfort of man, now *makes it empty and waste* (v. 1), for its Creator is and will be its Judge; he has an incontestible right to pass sentence upon it and an irresistible power to execute that sentence. *It is the Lord that has spoken this*

*word*, and he will do the work (v. 2); it is his curse that has *devoured the earth* (v. 6), the general curse which sin brought upon *the ground for man's sake* (Gen. iii. 17), and all the particular curses which families and countries bring upon themselves by their enormous wickedness. See the power of God's curse, how it makes all empty and lays all waste; those whom he curses are cursed indeed.

III. Persons of all ranks and conditions shall share in these calamities (v. 2): *It shall be as with the people, so with the priest, &c.* This is true of many of the common calamities of human life; all are subject to the same diseases of body, sorrows of mind, afflictions in relations, and the like. There is one event to those of very different stations; time and chance happen to them all. It is in a special manner true of the destroying judgments which God sometimes brings upon sinful nations; when he pleases he can make them universal, so that none shall escape them or be exempt from them; whether men have little or much, they shall lose it all. Those of the meaner rank smart first by famine; but those of the higher rank go first into captivity, while the poor of the land are left. It shall be all alike, 1. With high and low: *As with the people, so with the priest, or prince*. The dignity of magistrates and ministers, and the respect and reverence due to both, shall not secure them. *The faces of elders are not honoured*, Lam. v. 12. The priests had been as corrupt and wicked as the people; and, if their character served not to restrain them from sin, how can they expect it should serve to secure them from judgments? In both it is *like people, like priest*, Hosea iv. 8, 9. 2. With bond and free: *As with the servant, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress*. They have all corrupted their way, and therefore will all be made miserable when the earth is made waste. 3. With rich and poor. Those that have money beforehand, that are purchasing, and letting out money to interest, will fare no better than those that are so impoverished that they are forced to sell their estates and take up money at interest. There are judgments short of the great day of judgment in which rich and poor meet together. Let not those that are advanced in the world set their inferiors at too great a distance, because they know not how soon they may be set upon a level with them. *The rich man's wealth is his strong city* in his own conceit; but it does not always prove so.

IV. It is sin that brings these calamities upon the earth. The earth is made empty, and fades away, because it is *defiled under the inhabitants thereof* (v. 5); it is polluted by the sins of men, and therefore it is made desolate by the judgments of God. Such is the filthy nature of sin that it defiles the earth itself under the sinful inhabitants



thereof, and it is rendered unpleasant in the eyes of God and good men. See Lev. xviii. 25, 27, 28. Blood, in particular, defiles the land, Num. xxxv. 33. The earth never spues out its inhabitants till they have first defiled it by their sins. Why, what have they done? 1. They have transgressed the laws of their creation, not answered the ends of it. The bonds of the law of nature have been broken by them, and they have cast from them the cords of their obligations to the God of nature. 2. *They have changed the ordinances* of revealed religion, those of them that have had the benefit of that. *They have neglected the ordinances* (so some read it), and have made no conscience of observing them. They have passed over the laws, in the commission of sin, and have passed by the ordinance, in the omission of duty. 3. Herein they have *broken the everlasting covenant*, which is a perpetual bond and will be to those that keep it a perpetual blessing. It is God's wonderful condescension that he is pleased to deal with men in a covenant-way, to do them good, and thereby oblige them to do him service. Even those that had no benefit by God's covenant with Abraham had benefit by his covenant with Noah and his sons, which is called an *everlasting covenant*, his covenant with day and night; but they observe not the precepts of the sons of Noah, they acknowledge not God's goodness in the day and night, nor study to make him any grateful returns, and so break the everlasting covenant and defeat the gracious designs and intentions of it.

V. These judgments shall humble men's pride and mar their mirth. When the earth is made empty, 1. It is a great mortification to men's pride (v. 4): *The haughty people of the earth do languish*; for they have lost that which supported their pride, and for which they magnified themselves. As for those that have held their heads highest, God can make them hang the head. 2. It is a great damp to men's jollity. This is enlarged upon much (v. 7—9): *All the merry-hearted do sigh*. Such is the nature of carnal mirth, it is but *as the crackling of thorns under a pot*, Eccl. vii. 6. Great laughers commonly end in a sigh. Those that make the world their chief joy cannot rejoice evermore. When God sends his judgments into the earth he designs thereby to make those serious that were wholly addicted to their pleasures. *Let your laughter be turned into mourning*. When the earth is emptied the noise of those that rejoice in it ends. Carnal joy is a noisy thing; but the noise of it will soon be at an end, and the end of it is heaviness. Two things are made use of to excite and express vain mirth, and the jovial crew is here deprived of both:—(1.) Drinking: *The new wine mourns*; it has grown sour for want of drinking; for, how proper soever it may be for the heavy heart (Prov. xxxi. 6), it does not relish to them

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as it does to the merry-hearted. *The vine languishes*, and gives little hopes of a vintage, and therefore *the merry-hearted do sigh*; for they know no other gladness than that of their corn, and wine, and oil increasing (Ps. iv. 7), and, if you *destroy their vines and their fig-trees, you make all their mirth to cease*, Hosea ii. 11, 12. *They shall not now drink wine with a song and with luzzas*, as they used to do, but rather drink it with a sigh; nay, *Strong drink shall be bitter to those that drink it*, because they cannot but mingle their tears with it; or, through sickness, they have lost the relish of it. God has many ways to embitter wine and strong drink to those that love them and have the highest gust of them: distemper of body, anguish of mind, the ruin of the estate or country, will make the strong drink bitter and all the delights of sense tasteless and insipid. (2.) Music: *The mirth of tabrets ceases, and the joy of the harp*, which used to be at their feasts, ch. v. 12. The captives in Babylon hang their harps on the willow trees. In short, *All joy is darkened*; there is not a pleasant look to be seen, nor has any one power to force a smile; all the *mirth of the land is gone* (v. 11); and, if it was that mirth which Solomon calls *madness*, there is no great loss of it.

VI. The cities will in a particular manner feel from these desolations of the country (v. 10): *The city of confusion is broken, is broken down* (so we read it); it lies exposed to invading powers, not only by the breaking down of its walls, but by the confusion that the inhabitants are in. *Every house is shut up*, perhaps by reason of the plague, which has burned or consumed the inhabitants, so that there are *few men left*, v. 6. Houses infected are usually shut up that no man may come in. Or they are shut up because they are deserted and uninhabited. *There is a crying for wine*, that is, for the spoiling of the vintage, so that there is likely to be no wine. *In the city*, in Jerusalem itself, that had been so much frequented, there shall be left nothing but *desolation*; grass shall grow in the streets, and *the gate is smitten with destruction* (v. 12); all that used to pass and repass through the gate are smitten, and all the strength of the city is cut off. How soon can God make a city of order a city of confusion, and then it will soon be a city of desolation!

13 When thus it shall be in the midst of the land among the people, *there shall be as the shaking of an olive-tree, and as the gleaning grapes when the vintage is done*. 14 They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing for the majesty of the LORD, they shall cry aloud from the sea. 15 Wherefore glorify ye the LORD

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in the fires, *even* the name of the LORD God of Israel in the isles of the sea.

Here is mercy remembered in the midst of wrath. In Judah and Jerusalem, and the neighbouring countries, when they are overrun by the enemy, Sennacherib or Nebuchadnezzar, there shall be a remnant preserved from the general ruin, and it shall be a devout and pious remnant. And this method God usually observes when his judgments are abroad; he does not make a full end, *ch. vi. 13.* Or we may take it thus: Though the greatest part of mankind have all their comfort ruined by the emptying of the earth, and the making of that desolate, yet there are some few who understand their interests better, who have laid up their treasure in heaven and not in things below, and therefore can keep up their comfort and joy in God even *when the earth mourns and fades away.* Observe,

I. The small number of this remnant, *v. 13.* When all goes to ruin *there shall be as the shaking of an olive-tree, and the gleaning grapes,* here and there one who shall escape the common calamity (as Noah and his family when the old world was drowned), that shall be able to sit down upon a heap of the ruins of all their creature comforts, and even then rejoice in the Lord (*Hab. iii. 16—18*), who, when all faces gather blackness, can lift up their heads with joy, *Luke xxi. 26, 28.* These few are dispersed, and at a distance from each other, like the gleanings of the olive-tree; and they are concealed, hid under the leaves. The Lord only knows those that are his; the world does not.

II. The great devotion of this remnant, which is the greater for their having so narrowly escaped this great destruction (*v. 14*): *They shall lift up their voice; they shall sing.* 1. They shall sing for joy in their deliverance. When the mirth of carnal worldlings ceases the joy of the saints is as lively as ever; when the merry-hearted do sigh because the vine languishes the upright-hearted do sing because the covenant of grace, the fountain of their comforts and the foundation of their hopes, never fails. Those that rejoice in the Lord can rejoice in tribulation, and by faith may be in triumphs when all about them are in tears. 2. They shall sing to the glory and praise of God, shall sing not only for the mercy but *for the majesty of the Lord.* Their songs are awful and serious, and in their spiritual joys they have a reverend regard to the greatness of God, and keep at a humble distance when they attend him with their praises. The majesty of the Lord, which is matter of terror to wicked people, furnishes the saints with songs of praise. They shall sing for the magnificence, or transcendent excellency, of the Lord, shown both in his judgments and in his mercies; for we must sing, and sing unto him, of both, *Ps. ci. 1.* Those

who have made, or are making, their escape from the land (that being emptied and made desolate) to the sea and the isles of the sea, shall thence cry aloud; their dispersion shall help to spread the knowledge of God, and they shall make even remote shores to ring with his praises. It is much for the honour of God if those who fear him rejoice in him, and praise him, even in the most melancholy times.

III. Their holy zeal to excite others to the same devotion (*v. 15*); they encourage their fellow-sufferers to do likewise. 1. Those who are *in the fires*, in the furnace of affliction, those fires by which the *inhabitants of the earth are burned*, *v. 6.* Or in the valleys, the low, dark, dirty places. 2. Those who are *in the isles of the sea*, whither they are banished, or are forced to flee for shelter, and hide themselves remote from all their friends. They went *through fire and water* (*Ps. lxxvi. 12*); yet in both let them glorify the Lord, and glorify him as the Lord God of Israel. Those who through grace can glory in tribulation ought to glorify God in tribulation, and give him thanks for their comforts, which abound as their afflictions do abound. We must in every fire, even the hottest, in every isle, even the remotest, keep up our good thoughts of God. When, though he slay us, yet we trust in him—when, though for his sake we are killed all the day long, yet none of these things move us—then we glorify the Lord in the fires. Thus the three children, and the martyrs that sang at the stake.

16 From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs, *even* glory to the righteous. But I said, My leanness, my leanness, woe unto me! The treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously; yea, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously. 17 Fear, and the pit, and the snare, *are* upon thee, O inhabitant of the earth. 18 And it shall come to pass, *that* he who fleeth from the noise of the fear shall fall into the pit; and he that cometh up out of the midst of the pit shall be taken in the snare: for the windows from on high are open, and the foundations of the earth do shake. 19 The earth is utterly broken down, the earth is clean dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly. 20 The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage; and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it; and it shall fall and not rise again. 21 And it shall



come to pass in that day, *that* the LORD shall punish the host of the high ones *that are* on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth. 22 And they shall be gathered together, *as* prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days shall they be visited. 23 Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the LORD of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously.

These verses, as those before, plainly speak,

I. Comfort to saints. They may be driven, by the common calamities of the places where they live, into *the uttermost parts of the earth*, or perhaps they are forced thither for their religion; but there they are singing, not sighing. Thence have we heard songs, and it is a comfort to us to hear them, to hear that good people carry their religion along with them even to the most distant regions, to hear that God visits them there and gives encouragement to hope that he will gather them thence, Deut. xxx. 4. And this is their song, *even glory to the righteous*: the word is singular, and may refer to *the righteous God*, who is just in all he has brought upon us. This is glorifying the Lord in the fires. Or the meaning may be, "These songs redound to the glory or beauty of the righteous that sing them." We do the greatest honour imaginable to ourselves when we employ ourselves in honouring and glorifying God. This may have reference to the sending of the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth, as far off as this island of ours, in the days of the Messiah, the glad tidings of which are echoed back in songs heard thence, from churches planted there, even glory to the righteous God, agreeing with the angels' song, *Glory be to God in the highest*, and glory to all righteous men; for the work of redemption was ordained before the world for our glory.

II. Terror to sinners. The prophet, having comforted himself and others with the prospect of a saved remnant, returns to lament the miseries he saw breaking in like a mighty torrent upon the earth! "But I said, My leanness! my leanness! woe unto me! The very thought of it frets me, and makes me lean," v. 16. He foresees,

1. The prevalence of sin, that iniquity should abound (v. 16): *The treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously*; this is itself a judgment, and that which provokes God to bring other judgments. (1.) Men are false to one another; there is no faith in man, but a universal dishonesty. Truth, that sacred bond of society, has departed,

and there is nothing but treachery in men's dealings. See Jer. ix. 1, 2. (2.) They are all false to their God; as to him, and their covenant with him, the children of men are all treacherous dealers, and have dealt very treacherously with their God, in departing from their allegiance to him. This is the original, and this the aggravation, of the sin of the world; and, when men have been false to their God, how should they be true to any other?

2. The prevalence of wrath and judgment for that sin. (1.) The inhabitants of the earth will be pursued from time to time, from place to place, by one mischief or other (v. 17, 18): *Fear, and the pit, and the snare* (fear of the pit and the snare) are upon them wherever they are; for the sons of men know not what evil they may suddenly be snared in, Eccl. ix. 12. These three words seem to be chosen for the sake of an elegant paranomasia, or, as we now scornfully call it, a jingle of words: *Pachad, and Pachath, and Pach*; but the meaning is plain (v. 18), that *evil pursues sinners* (Prov. xiii. 21), that the curse shall overtake the disobedient (Deut. xxviii. 15), that those who are secure because they have escaped one judgment know not how soon another may arrest them. What this prophet threatens all the inhabitants of the earth with another makes part of the judgment of Moab, Jer. xlviii. 43, 44. But it is a common instance of the calamitous state of human life that when we seek to avoid one mischief we fall into a worse, and that the end of one trouble is often the beginning of another; so that we are least safe when we are most secure. (2.) The earth itself will be shaken to pieces. It will be literally so at last, when all *the works therein shall be burnt up*; and it is often figuratively so before that period. *The windows from on high are open* to pour down wrath, as in the universal deluge. *Upon the wicked God shall rain snares* (Ps. xi. 6); and, the fountains of the great deep being broken up, *the foundations of the earth do shake* of course, the frame of nature is unhinged, and all is in confusion. See how elegantly this is expressed (v. 19, 20): *The earth is utterly broken down; it is clean dissolved; it is moved exceedingly, moved out of its place. God shakes heaven and earth*, Hag. ii. 6. See the misery of those who lay up their treasure in the things of the earth and mind those things; they place their confidence in that which will shortly be *utterly broken down and dissolved. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard*; so unsteady, so uncertain, are all the motions of these things. Worldly men dwell in it as in a palace, as in a castle, as in an impregnable tower; but *it shall be removed like a cottage*, so easily, so suddenly, and with so little loss to the great landlord. The pulling down of the earth will be but like the pulling down of a

cottage, which the country is willing to be rid of, because it does but harbour beggars; and therefore no care is taken to rebuild it: *It shall fall, and not rise again*; but there shall be new heavens and a new earth, in which shall dwell nothing but righteousness. But what is it that shakes the earth thus and sinks it? It is the transgression thereof that shall be heavy upon it. Note, Sin is a burden to the whole creation; it is a heavy burden, a burden under which it groans now and will sink at last. Sin is the ruin of states, and kingdoms, and families; they fall under the weight of that *talent of lead*, Zech. v 7, 8. (3.) God will have a particular controversy with the kings and great men of the earth (v. 21): *He will punish the host of the high ones*. Hosts of princes are no more before God than hosts of common men; what can a host of high ones do with their combined force when the Most High, the Lord of hosts, contends with them to abase their height, and scatter their hosts, and break all their confederacies? The high ones, that are on high, that are puffed up with their height and grandeur, that think themselves so high that they are out of the reach of any danger, God will visit upon them all their pride and cruelty, with which they have oppressed and injured their neighbours and subjects, and it shall now return upon their own heads. *The kings of the earth* shall now be reckoned with *upon the earth*, to show that verily there is a God that judges in the earth and will render to the proudest of kings according to the fruit of their doings. Let those that are trampled upon by the high ones of the earth comfort themselves with this, that though they cannot, dare not, must not, resist them, yet there is a God that will call them to an account, that will triumph over them upon their own dunghill: for the earth they are kings of is in the eye of God no better. This is general only. It is particularly foretold (v. 22) that they shall be *gathered together as prisoners*, convicted condemned prisoners, are *gathered in the pit*, or dungeon, and there they shall be *shut up* under close confinement. The kings and high ones, who took all possible liberty themselves, and took a pride and pleasure in shutting up others, shall now be themselves shut up. Let not the free man glory in his freedom, any more than the strong man in his strength, for he knows not what restraints he is reserved for. But *after many days they shall be visited*, either, [1.] They shall be visited in wrath; it is the same word, in another form, that is used (v. 21), *the Lord shall punish* them; they shall be reserved to the day of execution, as condemned prisoners are, and as fallen angels are *reserved in chains of darkness to the judgment of the great day*, Jude 6. Let this account for the delays of divine vengeance; sentence is not executed speedily, because execution-day has not yet come, and

perhaps will not come till after many days; but it is certain that the wicked is reserved for the day of destruction, and is therefore preserved in the mean time, but *shall be brought forth to the day of wrath*, Job xxi. 30. Let us therefore judge nothing before the time. [2.] They shall be visited in mercy, and be discharged from their imprisonment, and shall again obtain, if not their dignity, yet their liberty. Nebuchadnezzar, in his conquests, made many kings and princes his captives, and kept them in the dungeon in Babylon, and, among the rest, Jehoiachin king of Judah; but after many days, when Nebuchadnezzar's head was laid, his son visited them, and granted (as should seem) some reviving to them all in their bondage; for it is made an instance of his particular kindness to Jehoiachin that he *set his throne above the throne of the rest of the kings that were with him*, Jer. lii. 32. If we apply this to the general state of mankind, it imports a revolution of conditions; those that were high are punished, those that were punished are relieved, after many days, that none in this world may be secure though their condition be ever so prosperous, nor any despair though their condition be ever so deplorable.

3. Glory to God in all this, v. 23. When all this comes to pass, when the proud enemies of God's church are humbled and brought down, (1.) Then it shall appear, beyond contradiction, that the Lord reigns, which is always true, but not always alike evident. When the kings of the earth are punished for their tyranny and oppression, then it is proclaimed and proved to all the world that God is King of kings—King above them, by whom they are conquerable—King over them, to whom they are accountable—that he reigns as *Lord of hosts*, of all hosts, of their hosts,—that he reigns *in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem*, in his church, for the honour and welfare of that, pursuant to the promises on which that is founded, reigns in his word and ordinances,—that he reigns *before his ancients*, before all his saints, especially before his ministers, the elders of his church, who have their eye upon all the out-goings of his power and providence, and, in all these events, observe his hand. God's ancients, the old disciples, the experienced Christians, that have often, when they have been perplexed, gone into the sanctuary of God in Zion and Jerusalem, and acquainted themselves with his manifestations of himself there, shall see more than others of God's dominion and sovereignty in these operations of his providence. (2.) Then it shall appear, beyond comparison, that he reigns *gloriously*, in such brightness and lustre that *the moon shall be con-founded and the sun asham'd*, as the smaller lights are eclipsed and extinguished by the greater. Great men, who thought themselves to have as bright a lustre and as vast



a dominion as the sun and moon, shall be ashamed when God appears above them, much more when he appears against them. Then shall *their faces be filled with shame*, that they may seek God's name. The eastern nations worshipped the sun and moon; but, when God shall appear so gloriously for his people against his and their enemies, all these pretended deities shall be ashamed that ever they received the homage of their deluded worshippers. The glory of the Creator infinitely outshines the glory of the brightest creatures. In the great day, when the Judge of heaven and earth shall shine forth in his glory, *the sun shall by his transcendent lustre be turned into darkness and the moon into blood.*

CHAP. XXV.

After the threatenings of wrath in the foregoing chapter we have here, I. Thankful praises for what God had done, which the prophet, in the name of the church, offers up to God, and teaches us to offer the like, ver. 1—5. II. Precious promises of what God would yet further do for his church, especially in the grace of the gospel, ver. 6—8. III. The church's triumph in God over her enemies thereupon, ver. 9—12. This chapter looks as pleasantly upon the church as the former looked dreadfully upon the world.

**O** LORD, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth. 2 For thou hast made of a city an heap; of a defenced city a ruin: a palace of strangers to be no city; it shall never be built. 3 Therefore shall the strong people glorify thee, the city of the terrible nations shall fear thee. 4 For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall. 5 Thou shalt bring down the noise of strangers, as the heat in a dry place; even the heat with the shadow of a cloud: the branch of the terrible ones shall be brought low.

It is said in the close of the foregoing chapter that the *Lord of hosts shall reign gloriously*; now, in compliance with this, the prophet here speaks of *the glorious majesty of his kingdom* (Ps. cxlv. 12), and gives him the glory of it; and, however this prophecy might have an accomplishment in the destruction of Babylon and the deliverance of the Jews out of their captivity there, it seems to look further, to the praises that should be offered up to God by the gospel church for Christ's victories over our spiritual enemies and the comforts he has provided for all believers. Here,

I. The prophet determines to praise God himself; for those that would stir up others should in the first place stir up themselves

to praise God (v. 1): "*O Lord! thou art my God, a God in covenant with me.*" When God is punishing the kings of the earth upon the earth, and making them to tremble before him, a poor prophet can go to him, and, with a humble boldness, say, *O Lord! thou art my God, and therefore I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name.* Those that have the Lord for their God are bound to praise him; for therefore he took us to be his people that we might be unto him for a name and for a praise, Jer. xiii. 11. In praising God we exalt him; not that we can make him higher than he is, but we must make him to appear to ourselves and others higher than he does. See Exod. xv. 2.

II. He pleases himself with the thought that others also shall be brought to praise God, v. 3. "*Therefore, because of the desolations thou hast made in the earth by thy providence* (Ps. xlv. 8) and the just vengeance thou hast taken on thy and thy church's enemies, *therefore shall the strong people glorify thee in concert, and the city* (the metropolis) *of the terrible nations* (or the cities of such nations) *shall fear thee.*" This may be understood, 1. Of those people that have been strong and terrible against God. Those that have been enemies to God's kingdom, and have fought against the interests of it with a great deal of strength and terror, shall either be converted, and glorify God by joining with his people in his service, or at least convinced, so as to own themselves conquered. Those that have been the terror of the mighty shall be forced to tremble before the judgments of God and call in vain to rocks and mountains to hide them. Or, 2. Of those that shall be now made strong and terrible for God and by him, though before they were weak and trampled upon. God shall so visibly appear for and with those that fear him and glorify him that all shall acknowledge them a strong people and shall stand in awe of them. There was a time when many of the people of the land became Jews, for the fear of the Jews fell upon them (Esther viii. 17), and when those that knew their God were strong and did exploits (Dan. xi. 32), for which they glorified God.

III. He observes what is, and ought to be, the matter of this praise. We and others must exalt God and praise him; for, 1. He has done wonders, according to the counsel of his own will, v. 1. We exalt God by admiring what he has done as truly wonderful, wonderful proofs of his power beyond what any creature could perform, and wonderful proofs of his goodness beyond what such sinful creatures as we are could expect. These wonderful things, which are new and surprising to us, and altogether unthought of, are according to his counsels of old, devised by his wisdom and designed for his own glory and the comfort of his people. All the operations of providence are according to God's eternal counsels (and those faithful-

ness and truth itself), all consonant to his attributes, consistent with one another, and sure to be accomplished in their season. 2. He has in particular humbled the pride, and broken the power, of the mighty ones of the earth (v. 2): "*Thou hast made of a city, of many a city, a heap of rubbish. Of many a defended city, that thought itself well guarded by nature and art, and the multitude and courage of its militia, thou hast made a ruin.*" What created strength can hold out against Omnipotence? "Many a city so richly built that it might be called a *palace*, and so much frequented and visited by persons of the best rank from all parts that it might be called a *palace of strangers*, thou hast made to be no city; it is levelled with the ground, and not one stone left upon another, and it shall never be built again." This has been the case of many cities in divers parts of the world, and in our own nation particularly; cities that flourished once have gone to decay and are lost, and it is scarcely known (except by urns or coins dug up out of the earth) where they stood. How many of the cities of Israel have long since been heaps and ruins! God hereby teaches us that *here we have no continuing city* and must therefore seek one to come which will never be a ruin or go to decay. 3. He has seasonably relieved and succoured his necessitous and distressed people (v. 4): "*Thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy.* As God weakens the strong that are proud and secure, so he strengthens the weak that are humble and serious, and stay themselves upon him. Nay, he not only makes them strong, but he is himself their strength; for in him they strengthen themselves, and it is his favour that is the *strength of their hearts*. He is a *strength to the needy in his distress*, when he needs strength, and when his distress drives him to God. And, as he strengthens them against their inward decays, so he shelters them from outward assaults. He is a *refuge from the storm of rain or hail, and a shadow from the scorching heat of the sun in summer*. God is a sufficient protection to his people in all weathers, hot and cold, wet and dry. The armour of righteousness serves both *on the right hand and on the left*, 2 Cor. vi. 7. Whatever dangers or troubles God's people may be in, effectual care is taken that they shall sustain no real hurt or damage. When perils are most threatening and alarming God will then appear for the safety of his people: *When the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall*, which makes a great noise, but cannot overthrow the wall. The enemies of God's poor are terrible ones; they do all they can to make themselves so to them. Their rage is like a blast of wind, loud, and blustering, and furious; but, like the wind, it is under a divine check; for God *holds the winds in his fist*, and God will be such a shelter to his people that they shall

be able to stand the shock, keep their ground, and maintain their integrity and peace. A storm beating on a ship tosses it, but that which beats on a wall never stirs it, Ps. lxxvi. 10; cxxxviii. 7. 4. That he does and will shelter those that trust in him from the insolence of their proud oppressors (v. 5): "*Thou shalt, or thou dost, bring down the noise of strangers; thou shalt abate and still it, as the heat in a dry place is abated and moderated by the shadow of a cloud interposing.* The branch, or rather the song or triumph, of the terrible ones shall be brought low, and they shall be made to change their note and lower their voice. Observe here, (1.) The oppressors of God's people are called *strangers*; for they forget that those they oppress are made of the same mould, of the same blood, with them. They are called *terrible ones*; for so they affect to be, rather than amiable ones: they would rather be feared than loved. (2.) Their insolence towards the people of God is noisy and hot, and that is all; it is but the noise of strangers, who think to carry their point by hectoring and bullying all that stand in their way, and talking big. *Pharaoh king of Egypt is but a noise*, Jer. xli. 17. It is like the heat of the sun scorching in the middle of the day; but where is it when the sun has set? (3.) Their noise, and heat, and all their triumph, will be humbled and brought low, when their hopes are baffled and all their honours laid in the dust. The branches, even the top branches, of the terrible ones, will be broken off, and thrown to the dunghill. (4.) If the labourers in God's vineyard be at any time called to *bear the burden and heat of the day*, he will find some way or other to refresh them, as with the shadow of a cloud, that they may not be pressed above measure.

6 And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. 7 And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. 8 He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it.

If we suppose (as many do) that this refers to the great joy which there should be in Zion and Jerusalem when the army of the Assyrians was routed by an angel, or when the Jews were released out of their captivity in Babylon, or upon occasion of some other equally surprising deliverance, yet we cannot avoid making it to look



further, to the grace of the gospel and the glory which is the crown and consummation of that grace; for it is at our resurrection through Christ that the saying here written *shall be brought to pass*; then, and not till then (if we may believe St. Paul), it shall have its full accomplishment: *Death is swallowed up in victory*, 1 Cor. xv. 54. This is a key to the rest of the promises here connected together. And so we have here a prophecy of the salvation and the grace brought unto us by Jesus Christ, into which *the prophets enquired and searched diligently*, 1 Pet. i. 10.

I. That the grace of the gospel should be a royal feast for all people; not like that of Ahasuerus, which was intended only to show the grandeur of the master of the feast (Esther i. 4); for this is intended to gratify the guests, and therefore, whereas all *there* was for show, all *here* is for substance. The preparations made in the gospel for the kind reception of penitents and supplicants with God are often in the New Testament set forth by the similitude of a *feast*, as Matt. xxii. 1. &c., which seems to be borrowed from this prophecy. 1. God himself is the Master of the feast, and we may be sure he prepares like himself, as becomes him to give, rather than as becomes us to receive. *The Lord of hosts* makes this feast. 2. The guests invited are *all people*, Gentiles as well as Jews. *Go preach the gospel to every creature*. There is enough for all, and whoever will may come, and partake freely, even those that are gathered out of the highways and the hedges. 3. The place is *Mount Zion*. Thence the preaching of the gospel takes rise: the preachers must begin at Jerusalem. The gospel church is the Jerusalem that is above; there this feast is made, and to it all the invited guests must go. 4. The provision is very rich, and every thing is of the best. It is a *feast*, which supposes abundance and variety; it is a continual feast to believers, it is their own fault if it be not. It is a *feast of fat things and full of marrow*; so relishing, so nourishing; are the comforts of the gospel to all those that feast upon them and digest them. The returning prodigal was entertained with the fatted calf; and David has that pleasure in communion with God with which his soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness. It is a *feast of wines on the lees*, the strongest-bodied wines, that have been kept long upon the lees, and then are well refined from them, so that they are clear and fine. There is that in the gospel which, like wine soberly used, makes glad the heart and raises the spirits, and is fit for those that are of a heavy heart, being under convictions of sin and mourning for it, that they may drink and forget their misery (for that is the proper use of wine—it is a cordial for those that need it, Prov. xxxi. 6, 7), may

be of good cheer, knowing that their sins are forgiven, and may be vigorous in their spiritual work and warfare, as a strong man refreshed with wine.

II. That the world should be freed from that darkness of ignorance and mistake in the mists of which it had been so long lost and buried (v. 7): *He will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering* (the covering of the face) with which all people are covered (hood-winked or blind-folded) so that they cannot see their way nor go about their work, and by reason of which they wander endlessly. Their faces are covered as those of men condemned, or dead men. There is a *veil spread over all nations*, for they all sit in darkness; and no marvel, when the Jews themselves, among whom *God was known*, had a *veil upon their hearts*, 2 Cor. iii. 15. But this veil the Lord will destroy, by the light of his gospel shining in the world, and the power of his Spirit opening men's eyes to receive it. He will raise those to spiritual life that have long been dead in trespasses and sins.

III. That death should be conquered, the power of it broken, and the property of it altered: *He will swallow up death in victory*, v. 8. 1. Christ will himself, in his resurrection, triumph over death, will break its bands, its bars, asunder, and cast away all its cords. The grave seemed to swallow him up, but really he swallowed it up. 2. The happiness of the saints shall be out of the reach of death, which puts a period to all the enjoyments of this world, embitters them, and stains the beauty of them. 3. Believers may triumph over death, and look upon it as a conquered enemy: *O death! where is thy sting?* 4. When the dead bodies of the saints shall be raised at the great day, and their mortality swallowed up of life, then death will be for ever swallowed up of victory; and it is the last enemy.

IV. That grief shall be banished, and there shall be perfect and endless joy: *The Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces*. Those that mourn for sin shall be comforted and have their consciences pacified. In the covenant of grace there shall be that provided which is sufficient to counterbalance all the sorrows of this present time, to wipe away our tears, and to refresh us. Those particularly that suffer for Christ shall have consolations abounding as their afflictions do abound. But in the joys of heaven, and nowhere short of them, will fully be *brought to pass this saying*, as that before, for there it is that God shall *wipe away all tears*, Rev. vii. 17; xxi. 4. And *there shall be no more sorrow, because there shall be no more death*. The hope of this should now wipe away all excessive tears, all the weeping that hinders sowing.

V. That all the reproach cast upon religion and the serious professors of it shall be for ever rolled away: *The rebuke of his*

people, which they have long lain under, the calumnies and misrepresentations by which they have been blackened, the insolence and cruelty with which their persecutors have trampled on them and trodden them down, *shall be taken away*. Their righteousness shall be brought forth as the light, in the view of all the world, who shall be convinced that they are not such as they have been invidiously characterized; and so their salvation from the injuries done them as such shall be wrought out. Sometimes in this world God does that for his people which *takes away their reproach from among men*. However, it will be done effectually at the great day; for the *Lord has spoken it*, who can, and will, make it good. Let us patiently bear sorrow and shame now, and improve both; for shortly both will be done away.

9 And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this *is* our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this *is* the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation. 10 For in this mountain shall the hand of the LORD rest, and Moab shall be trodden down under him, even as straw is trodden down for the dunghill. 11 And he shall spread forth his hands in the midst of them, as he that swimmeth spreadeth forth *his hands* to swim: and he shall bring down their pride together with the spoils of their hands. 12 And the fortress of the high fort of thy walls shall he bring down, lay low, *and* bring to the ground, *even* to the dust.

Here is, I. The welcome which the church shall give to these blessings promised in the foregoing verses (v. 9): *It shall be said in that day*, with a humble holy triumph and exultation, *Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him!* Thus will the deliverance of the church out of long and sore troubles be celebrated; thus will it be as life from the dead. With such transports of joy and praise will those entertain the glad tidings of the Redeemer who looked for him, and for redemption in Jerusalem by him; and with such a triumphant song as this will glorified saints *enter into the joy of their Lord*. 1. God himself must have the glory of all: "*Lo, this is our God, this is the Lord*." This which is done is his doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. Herein he has done like himself, has magnified his own wisdom, power, and goodness. Herein he has done for us like our God, a God in covenant with us, and whom we serve." Note, Our triumphs must not terminate in

what God does for us and gives to us, but must pass through them to himself, who is the author and giver of them: *This is our God*. Have any of the nations of the earth such a God to trust to? No, *their rock is not as our rock. There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun*. 2. The longer it has been expected the more welcome it is. "This is he whom we have waited for, in dependence upon his word of promise, and a full assurance that he would come in the set time, in due time, and therefore we were willing to tarry his time; and now we find it is not in vain to wait for him, for the mercy comes at last, with an abundant recompence for the delay." 3. It is matter of joy unspeakable: "*We will be glad and rejoice in his salvation*." We that share in the benefits of it will concur in the joyful thanksgivings for it." 4. It is an encouragement to hope for the continuance and perfection of this salvation: *We have waited for him, and he will save us*, will carry on what he has begun; for *as for God, our God, his work is perfect*.

II. A prospect of further blessings for the securing and perpetuating of these. 1. The power of God shall be engaged for them and shall continue to take their part: *In this mountain shall the hand of the Lord rest*, v. 10. The church and people of God shall have continued proofs of God's presence with them and residence among them: his hand shall be continually over them, to protect and guard them, and continually stretched out to them, for their supply. Mount Zion is *his rest for ever*; here he will dwell. 2. The power of their enemies, which is engaged against them, shall be broken. Moab is here put for all the adversaries of God's people, that are vexatious to them; they shall all be trodden down or threshed (for then they beat out the corn by treading it) and shall be thrown out as straw to the dunghill, being good for nothing else. God having caused his hand to rest upon this mountain, it shall not be a hand that hangs down, or is folded up, feeble and inactive; but he shall spread forth his hands, in the midst of his people, like one that swims, which intimates that he will employ and exert his power for them vigorously,—that he will be doing for them on all sides,—that he will easily and effectually put by the opposition that is given to his gracious intentions for them, and thereby further and push forward his good work among them,—and that on their behalf he will be continually active, for so the swimmer is. It is foretold, particularly, what he shall do for them. (1.) *He shall bring down the pride of their enemies* (and Moab was notoriously guilty of pride, ch. xvi. 6) by one humbling judgment after another, stripping them of that which they are proud of. (2.) *He shall bring down the spoils of their hands*, shall take from them that which they have



got by spoil and rapine. He shall bring down the arms of their hands, which are lifted up against God's Israel; he shall quite break their power, and disable them to do mischief. (3.) He shall ruin all their fortifications, *v. 12.* Moab has his walls, and his high forts, with which he hopes to secure himself, and from which he designs to annoy the people of God; but God shall *bring them all down, lay them low, bring them to the ground, to the dust*; and so those who trusted to them will be left exposed. There is no fortress impregnable to Omnipotence, no fort so high but the arm of the Lord can overtop it and bring it down. This destruction of Moab is typical of Christ's victory over death (spoken of *v. 8*), his spoiling principalities and powers in his cross (Col. ii. 15), his pulling down Satan's strong-holds by the preaching of his gospel (2 Cor. x. 4), and his reigning till all his enemies be made his *footstool*, Ps. cx. 1.

CHAP. XXVI.

This chapter is a song of holy joy and praise, in which the great things God had engaged, in the foregoing chapter, to do for his people against his enemies and their enemies are celebrated: It is prepared to be sung when that prophecy should be accomplished; for we must be forward to meet God with our thanksgivings when he is coming towards us with his mercies. Now the people of God are here taught, I. To triumph in the safety and holy security both of the church in general and of every particular member of it, under the divine protection, *ver. 1-4.* II. To triumph over all opposing powers, *ver. 5, 6.* III. To walk with God, and wait for him, in the worst and darkest times, *ver. 7-9.* IV. To lament the stupidity of those who regarded not the providence of God, either merciful or afflictive, *ver. 10, 11.* V. To encourage themselves, and one another, with hopes that God would still continue to do them good (*ver. 12, 14*), and engage themselves to continue in his service, *ver. 13.* VI. To recollect the kind providences of God towards them in their low and distressed condition, and their conduct under those providences, *ver. 15-18.* VII. To rejoice in hope of a glorious deliverance, which should be as a resurrection to them (*ver. 19*), and to retire in the expectation of it, *ver. 20, 21.* And this is written for the support and assistance of the faith and hope of God's people in all ages, even those upon whom the ends of the world have come.

**I**N that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. 2 Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in. 3 Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, *whose mind is stayed on thee*: because he trusteth in thee. 4 Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength.

To the prophecies of gospel grace very fitly is a song annexed, in which we may give God the glory and take to ourselves the comfort of that grace: *In that day*, the gospel day, which the day of the victories and enlargements of the Old-Testament church was typical of (to some of which perhaps this has a primary reference), *in that day this song shall be sung*: there shall be persons to sing it, and cause and hearts to sing it; it shall be sung *in the land of Judah*, which was a figure of the gospel church; for the gospel covenant is said to

be made *with the house of Judah*, Heb. viii. 8. Glorious things are here said of the church of God.

I. That it is strongly fortified against those that are bad (*v. 1*): *We have a strong city.* It is a city incorporated by the charter of the everlasting covenant, fitted for the reception of all that are made free by that charter, for their employment and entertainment; it is a strong city, as Jerusalem was, while it was a city compact together, and had God himself a wall of fire round about it, so strong that none would have believed that an enemy could ever *enter into the gates of Jerusalem*, Lam. iv. 12. The church is a strong city, for it has *walls and bulwarks*, or counterscarps, and those of God's own appointing; for he has, in his promise, appointed salvation itself to be its defence. Those that are designed for salvation will find that to be their protection, 1 Pet. i. 4.

II. That it is richly replenished with those that are good, and they are instead of fortifications to it; for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, if they are such as they should be, are its strength, Zech. xii. 5. The gates are here ordered to be opened, *that the righteous nation, which keeps the truth, may enter in, v. 2.* They had been banished and driven out by the iniquity of the former times, but now the laws that were made against them are repealed, and they have liberty to enter in again. Or, There is an act for a general naturalization of all the righteous, whatever nation they are of, encouraging them to come and settle in Jerusalem. When God has done great things for any place or people he expects that thus they should render according to the benefit done unto them; they should be kind to his people, and take them under their protection and into their bosom. Note, 1. It is the character of righteous men that they keep the truths of God, a firm belief of which will have a commanding influence upon the regularity of the whole conversation. Good principles fixed in the head will produce good resolutions in the heart and good practices in the life. 2. It is the interest of states to countenance such, and court them among them, for they bring a blessing with them.

III. That all who belong to it are safe and easy, and have a holy security and serenity of mind in the assurance of God's favour. 1. This is here the matter of a promise (*v. 3*): *Thou wilt keep him in peace, peace, in perfect peace*, inward peace, outward peace, peace with God, peace of conscience, peace at all times, under all events; this peace shall *be put into*, and kept in the possession of, *whose mind is stayed upon God, because it trusts in him.* It is the character of every good man that he trusts in God, puts himself under his guidance and government, and depends upon

him that it shall be greatly to his advantage to do so. Those that trust in God must have their minds stayed upon him, must trust him at all times, under all events, must firmly and faithfully adhere to him, with an entire satisfaction in him; and such as do so God will keep in perpetual peace, and that peace shall keep them. When evil tidings are abroad *those* shall calmly expect the event, and not be disturbed by frightful apprehensions arising from them, whose hearts are *fixed, trusting in the Lord*, Ps. cxii. 7. 2. It is the matter of a precept (v. 4): "Let us make ourselves easy by *trusting in the Lord for ever*; since God has promised peace to those that stay themselves upon him, let us not lose the benefit of that promise, but repose an entire confidence in him. Trust in him for ever, at all times, when you have nothing else to trust to; trust in him for that peace, that portion, which will be for ever." Whatever we trust to the world for, it will be but for a moment: all we expect from it is confined within the limits of time. But what we trust in God for will last as long as we shall last. For in the *Lord Jehovah—Jah, Jehorah*, in him who was, and is, and is to come, there is a rock of ages, a firm and lasting foundation for faith and hope to build upon; and the house built on that rock will stand in a storm. Those that trust in God shall not only find in him, but receive from him, *everlasting strength*, strength that will carry them to everlasting life, to that blessedness which is for ever; and therefore let them trust in him for ever, and never cast away nor change their confidence.

5 For he bringeth down them that dwell on high; the lofty city, he layeth it low; he layeth it low, *even* to the ground; he bringeth it *even* to the dust. 6 The foot shall tread it down, *even* the feet of the poor, *and* the steps of the needy. 7 The way of the just *is* uprightness: thou, most upright, dost weigh the path of the just. 8 Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O LORD, have we waited for thee; the desire of *our* soul *is* to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. 9 With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judgments *are* in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. 10 Let favour be showed to the wicked, *yet* will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the

majesty of the LORD. 11 LORD, *when* thy hand is lifted up, they will not see: *but* they shall see, and be ashamed for *their* envy at the people; yea, the fire of thine enemies shall devour them.

Here the prophet further encourages us to trust in the Lord for ever, and to continue waiting on him; for,

I. He will make humble souls that trust in him to triumph over their proud enemies, v. 5, 6. Those that exalt themselves shall be abased: For he *brings down those that dwell on high*; and wherein they deal proudly he is, and will be, above them. Even the lofty city Babylon itself, or Nineveh, he lays it low, ch. xxv. 12. He can do it, be it ever so well fortified. He has often done it. He will do it, for he resists the proud. It is his glory to do it, for he proves himself to be God by *looking on the proud and abasing them*, Job xl. 12. But, on the contrary, those that humble themselves shall be exalted; for *the feet of the poor* shall tread upon the lofty cities, v. 6. He does not say, Great armies shall tread them down; but, When God will have it done, even the feet of the poor shall do it, Mal. iv. 3. *You shall tread down the wicked. Come, set your feet on the necks of these kings.* See Ps. cxlvii. 6; Rom. xvi. 20.

II. He takes cognizance of the way of his people and has delight in it (v. 7): *The way of the just is evenness* (so it may be read): it is their endeavour and constant care to walk with God in an even steady course of obedience and holy conversation. *My foot stands in an even place*, goes in an even path, Ps. xxvi. 12. And it is their happiness that God makes their way plain and easy before them: *Thou, most upright, dost level (or make even) the path of the just*, by preventing or removing those things that would be stumbling-blocks to them, so that nothing shall offend them, Ps. cxix. 165. God *weighs* it (so we read it); he considers it, and will give them grace sufficient for them, to help them over all the difficulties they may meet with in their way. Thus with the upright God will show himself upright.

III. It is our duty, and will be our comfort, to wait for God, and to keep up holy desires towards him in the darkest and most discouraging times, v. 8, 9. This has always been the practice of God's people, even when God has frowned upon them, 1. To keep up a constant dependence upon him: "*In the way of thy judgments we have still waited for thee*; when thou hast corrected us we have looked to no other hand than thine to relieve us," as the servant looks only to the hand of his master, till he have mercy upon him, Ps. cxliii. 2. We cannot appeal from God's justice but to his mercy. If God's judgments continue long, if it be a



road of judgments (so the word signifies), yet we must not be weary but continue waiting. 2. To send up holy desires towards him. Our troubles, how pressing soever, must never put us out of conceit with our religion, nor turn us away from God; but still the desire of our soul must be to his name and to the remembrance of him; and in the night, the darkest longest night of affliction, with our souls must we desire him. (1.) Our great concern must be for God's name, and our earnest desire must be that his name may be glorified, whatever becomes of us and our names. This is that which we must wait for, and pray for. "*Father, glorify thy name, and we are satisfied.*" (2.) Our great comfort must be in the remembrance of that name, of all that whereby God has made himself known. The remembrance of God must be our great support and pleasure; and, though sometimes we be unmindful of him, yet still our desire must be towards the remembrance of him and we must take pains with our own hearts to have him always in mind. (3.) Our desires towards God must be inward, fervent, and sincere. With our soul we must desire him, with our soul we must pant after him (Ps. xlii. 1), and with our spirits within us, with the innermost thought and the closest application of mind, we must seek him. We make nothing of our religion, whatever our profession be, if we do not make heart-work of it. (4.) Even in the darkest night of affliction our desires must be towards God, as our sun and shield; for, however God is pleased to deal with us, we must never think the worse of him, nor cool in our love to him. (5.) If our desires be indeed towards God, we must give evidence that they are so by seeking him, and seeking him early, as those that desire to find him, and dread the thoughts of missing him. Those that would seek God and find him must seek betimes, and seek him earnestly. Though we come ever so early, we shall find him ready to receive us.

IV. It is God's gracious design, in sending abroad his judgments, thereby to bring men to seek him and serve him: *When thy judgments are upon the earth*, laying all waste, then we have reason to expect that not only God's professing people, but even the inhabitants of the world, will learn righteousness, will have their mistakes rectified and their lives reformed, will be brought to acknowledge God's righteousness in punishing them, will repent of their own unrighteousness in offending God, and so be brought to walk in right paths. They will do this; that is, judgments are designed to bring them to this, they have a natural tendency to produce this effect, and, though many continue obstinate, yet some even of the inhabitants of the world will profit by this discipline, and will learn righteousness: surely they will; they are strangely stupid if they do

not. Note, The intention of afflictions is to teach us righteousness; and blessed is the man whom God chastens, and thus teaches, Ps. xciv. 12. *Discite justitiam, moniti, et non temnere diros—Let this rebuke teach you to cultivate righteousness, and cease from despising the gods.*—Virgil.

V. Those are wicked indeed that will not be wrought upon by the favourable methods God takes to subdue and reform them; and it is necessary that God should deal with them in a severe way by his judgments, which shall prevail to humble those that would not otherwise be humbled. Observe,

1. How sinners walk contrary to God, and refuse to comply with the means used for their reformation and to answer the intentions of them, v. 10. (1.) *Favour is shown to them.* They receive many mercies from God; he causes his sun to shine and his rain to fall upon them, nay, he prospers them, and into their hands he brings plentifully; they escape many of the strokes of God's judgments, which others less wicked than they have been cut off by; in some particular instances, they seem to be remarkably favoured above their neighbours, and the design of all this is that they may be won upon to love and serve that God who thus favours them; and yet it is all in vain: *they will not learn righteousness*, will not be led to repentance by the goodness of God, and therefore it is requisite that God should send his judgments into the earth, to reckon with men for abused mercies. (2.) *They live in a land of uprightness*, where religion is professed and is in reputation, where the word of God is preached, and where they have many good examples set them,—in a land of *evenness*, where there are not so many stumbling-blocks as in other places,—in a land of *correction*, where vice and profaneness are discountenanced and punished; yet there they will *deal unjustly*, and go on frowardly in their evil ways. Those that do wickedly deal unjustly both with God and man, as well as with their own souls; and those that will not be reclaimed by the justice of the nation may expect the judgments of God upon them. Nor can those expect a place hereafter in the land of blessedness who now conform not to the laws and usages, nor improve the privileges and advantages, of the land of uprightness; and why do they not? It is because they *will not behold the majesty of the Lord*, will not believe, will not consider, what a God of terrible majesty he is whose laws and justice they persist in the contempt of. God's majesty appears in all the dispensations of his providence; but they regard it not, and therefore study not to answer the ends of those dispensations. Even when we receive of the mercy of the Lord we must still behold the *majesty of the Lord and his goodness*. (3.) God lifts up his hand to give them warning, that they may, by re-

penitance and prayer, make their peace with him; but they take no notice of it, are not aware that God is angry with them, or coming forth against them: *They will not see*, and none so blind as those who will not see, who shut their eyes against the clearest conviction of guilt and wrath, who ascribe that to chance, or common fate, which is manifestly a divine rebuke, who regard not the threatening symptoms of their own ruin, but cry Peace to themselves, when the righteous God is waging war with them.

2. How God will at length be too hard for them; for, when he judges, he will overcome: *They will not see, but they shall see*, shall be made to see, whether they will or no, that God is angry with them. Atheists, scorners, and the secure, will shortly feel what now they will not believe, that *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*. They will not see the evil of sin, and particularly the sin of hating and persecuting the people of God; but they shall see, by the tokens of God's displeasure against them for it and the deliverances in which God will plead his people's cause, that what is done against them he takes as done against himself and will reckon for it accordingly. They shall see that they have done God's people a great deal of wrong, and therefore shall be ashamed of their enmity and envy towards them, and their ill usage of such as deserved better treatment. Note, Those that bear ill-will to God's people have reason to be ashamed of it, so absurd and unreasonable is it; and, sooner or later, they shall be ashamed of it, and the remembrance of it shall fill them with confusion. Some read it, *They shall see and be confounded for the zeal of the people*, by the zeal God will show for his people; when they shall be made to know how jealous God is for the honour and welfare of his people they shall be confounded to think that they might have been of that people and would not. Their doom therefore is that, since they slighted the happiness of God's friends, *the fire of his enemies shall devour them*, that is, the fire which is prepared for his enemies and with which they shall be devoured, the fire designed for the devil and his angels. Note, Those that are enemies to God's people, and envy them, God looks upon as his enemies, and will deal with them accordingly.

12 LORD, thou wilt ordain peace for us: for thou also hast wrought all our works in us. 13 O LORD our God, *other* lords beside thee have had dominion over us: *but* by thee only will we make mention of thy name. 14 *They are* dead, they shall not live; *they are* deceased, they shall not rise: therefore hast thou visited and destroyed them, and made all

their memory to perish. 15 Thou hast increased the nation, O LORD, thou hast increased the nation: thou art glorified: thou hadst removed *it* far *unto* all the ends of the earth. 16 LORD, in trouble have they visited thee, they poured out a prayer *when* thy chastening *was* upon them. 17 Like as a woman with child, *that* draweth near the time of her delivery, is in pain, *and* crieth out in her pangs; so have we been in thy sight, O LORD. 18 We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have as it were brought forth wind; we have not wrought any deliverance in the earth; neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen. 19 Thy dead *men* shall live, *together with* my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew *is as* the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.

The prophet in these verses looks back upon what God had done with them, both in mercy and judgment, and sings unto God of both, and then looks forward upon what he hoped God would do for them. Observe,

1. His reviews and reflections are mixed. When he looks back upon the state of the church he finds,

1. That God had in many instances been very gracious to them and had done great things for them. (1.) In general (v. 12): *Thou hast wrought all our works in us, or for us*. Whatever good work is done by us, it is owing to a good work wrought by the grace of God in us; it is he that puts good thoughts and affections into our hearts if at any time they be there, and that *works in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Acti, agimus—Being acted upon, we act*. And if any kindness be shown us, or any of our affairs be prosperous and successful, it is God that works it for us. Every creature, every business, that is in any way serviceable to our comfort, is made by him to be so; and sometimes he makes that to work for us which seemed to make against us. (2.) In particular (v. 15): "*Thou hast increased the nation, O Lord!*" so that a little one has become a thousand (in Egypt they multiplied exceedingly, and afterwards in Canaan, so that they filled the land); and in this *thou art glorified*," for the multitude of the people is the honour of the prince, and therein God was glorified as faithful to his covenant with Abraham, that he would make him a father of many nations. Note, God's nation is a growing nation, and it is



the glory of God that it is so. The increase of the church, that holy nation, is *therefore* to be rejoiced in because it is the increase of those that make it their business to glorify God in this world.

2. That yet he had laid them under his rebukes.

(1.) The neighbouring nations had sometimes oppressed them and tyrannised over them (v. 13): "*O Lord our God! thou who hast the sole right to rule us, whose subjects and servants we are, to thee we complain (for whither else should we go with our complaints?) that other lords besides thee have had dominion over us.*" Not only in the days of the Judges, but afterwards, God frequently sold them into the hand of their enemies, or rather, by their iniquities, they *sold themselves*, ch. lii. 3—5. When they had been careless in the service of God, God suffered their enemies to have dominion over them, that they might know the difference between his service and the service of the kingdoms of the countries. It may be understood as a confession of sin, their serving other gods, and subjecting themselves to the superstitious laws and customs of their neighbours, by which other lords (for they called their idols *baals*, *lords*) had dominion over them, besides God. But now they promise that it shall be so no more: "Henceforth by thee only will we make mention of thy name; we will worship thee only, and in that way only which thou hast instituted and appointed." The same may be our penitent reflection: *Other lords, besides God, have had dominion over us*; every lust has been our lord, and we have been led captive by it; and it has been long enough, and too long, that we have thus wronged both God and ourselves. The same therefore must be our pious resolution, that henceforth we will make mention of God's name only and by him only, that we will keep close to God and to our duty and never desert it.

(2.) They had sometimes been carried into captivity before their enemies (v. 15): "The nation which at first thou didst increase, and make to take root, thou hast now diminished, and plucked up, and removed to all the ends of the earth, driven out to the utmost parts of heaven," as is threatened, Deut. xxx. 4; xxviii. 64. But observe, Between the mention of the increasing of them and that of the removing of them it is said, *Thou art glorified*; for the judgments God inflicts upon his people for their sins are for his honour, as well as the mercies he bestows upon them in performance of his promise.

(3.) The prophet remembers that when they were thus oppressed and carried captive they cried unto God, which was a good evidence that they neither had quite forsaken him nor were quite forsaken of him, and that there were merciful intentions in the judgments they were under (v. 16): *Lord, in trouble have they visited*

*thee*. This was usual with the people of Israel, as we find frequently in the story of the Judges. When *other lords had dominion over them they humbled themselves, and said, The Lord is righteous*, 2 Chron. xii. 6. See here, [1.] The need we have of afflictions. They are necessary to stir up prayer; when it is said, *In trouble have they visited thee*, it is implied that in their peace and prosperity they were strangers to God, kept at a distance from him, and seldom came near him, as if, when the world smiled upon them, they had no occasion for his favours. [2.] The benefit we often have by afflictions. They bring us to God, quicken us to our duty, and show us our dependence upon him. Those that before seldom looked at God now visit him; they come frequently, they become friendly, and make their court to him. Before, prayer came drop by drop, but now they *pour out a prayer*; it comes now like water from a fountain, not like water from a still. They poured out a *secret speech*; so the margin. Praying is speaking to God, but it is a secret speech; for it is the language of the heart, otherwise it is not praying. Afflictions bring us to secret prayer, in which we may be more free and particular in our addresses to him than we can be in public. In affliction those will seek God early who before sought him slowly, Hos. v. 15. It will make men fervent and fluent in prayer. "They poured out a prayer, as the drink-offerings were poured out, when thy chastening was upon them." But it is to be feared, when the chastening is off them, they will by degrees return to their former carelessness, as they had often done.

(4.) He complains that their struggles for their own liberty had been very painful and perilous, but that they had not been successful, v. 17, 18. [1.] They had the throes and pangs they dreaded: "We have been like a woman in labour, that cries out in her pangs; we have with a great deal of anxiety and toil endeavoured to help ourselves, and our troubles have been increased by those attempts;" as when Moses came to deliver Israel the tale of bricks was doubled. Their prayers were quickened by the acuteness of their pains, and became as strong and vehement as the cries of a woman in sore travail. *So have we been in thy sight, O Lord!* It was a comfort and satisfaction to them, in their distress, that God had his eye upon them, that all their miseries were in his sight; he was no stranger to their pangs or their prayers. *Lord, all my desire is before thee, and my groaning is not hidden from thee*, Ps. xxxviii. 9. Whenever they came to present themselves before the Lord with their complaints and petitions they were in agonies like those of a woman in travail. [2.] They came short of the issue and success they desired and hoped for: "*We have been with child*; we have had great expectation of a speedy and happy deliverance, have been big with hopes,



and, when we have been in pain, have comforted ourselves with this, that the joyful birth would make us forget *our misery*, John xvi. 21. But, alas! *we have as it were brought forth wind*; it has proved a false conception; our expectations have been frustrated, and our pains have been rather dying pains than travelling ones; we have had a miscarrying womb and dry breasts. All our efforts have proved abortive: *We have not wrought any deliverance in the earth*, for ourselves or for our friends and allies, but rather have made our own case and theirs worse; *neither have the inhabitants of the world*, whom we have been contesting with, *fallen* before us, either in their power or in their hopes; but they are still as high and arrogant as ever." Note, A righteous cause may be strenuously pleaded both by prayer and endeavour, both with God and man, and yet for a great while may be left under a cloud, and the point may not be gained.

II. His prospects and hopes are very pleasant. In general, "*Thou wilt ordain peace for us* (v. 12), that is, all that good which the necessity of our case calls for." What peace the church has, or hopes for, it is of God's ordaining; and we may comfort ourselves with this, that, what trouble soever may for a time be appointed to the people of God, peace will at length be ordained for them; for the *end of those men is peace*. And, if God by his Spirit *work all our works in us*, he will ordain peace for us (for the work of righteousness shall be peace), and that is true and lasting peace, such as the world can neither give nor take away, which God ordains; for, to those that have it, it shall be unchangeable as the ordinances of the day and of the night. Moreover, from what God has done for us, we may encourage ourselves to hope that he will yet further do us good. "Thou hast heard the desire of the humble, and therefore wilt (Ps. x. 17); and, when this peace is ordained for us, then *by thee only will we make mention of thy name* (v. 13); we will give the glory of it to thee only, and not to any other, and we will depend upon thy grace only to enable us to do so." We cannot praise God's name but by his strength. Two things in particular the prophet here comforts the church with the prospect of:—1. The amazing ruin of her enemies (v. 14): *They are dead*, those other lords that *have had dominion over us*; their power is irrecoverably broken; they are quite cut off and extinguished: *and they shall not live*, shall never be able to hold up the head any more. Being deceased, *they shall not rise*, but, like Haman, when they have begun to fall before the seed of the Jews they shall sink like a stone. Because they are sentenced to this final ruin, therefore, in pursuance of that sentence, God himself has visited them in wrath, as a righteous Judge, and has cut off both the men themselves (*he has destroyed them*) and the remembrance of them: they and

their names are buried together in the dust. He has *made all their memory to perish*; they are either forgotten or made mention of with detestation. Note, The cause that is maintained in opposition to God and his kingdom among men, though it may prosper awhile, will certainly sink at last, and all that adhere to it will perish with it. The Jewish doctors, comparing this with v. 19, infer that the resurrection of the dead belongs to the Jews only, and that those of other nations shall not rise. But we know better; we know that *all who are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God*, and that this speaks of the final destruction of Christ's enemies, which is the second death. 2. The surprising resurrection of her friends, v. 19. Though the church rejoices not in the birth of the man-child, of which she travailed in pain, *but has as it were brought forth wind* (v. 18), yet the disappointment shall be balanced in a way equivalent: *Thy dead men shall live*; those who were thought to be dead, who had received a sentence of death within themselves, who were cast out as if they had been naturally dead, shall appear again in their former vigour. A spirit of life from God shall enter into the slain witnesses, and they shall prophesy again, Rev. xi. 11. *The dry bones shall live*, and become an *exceedingly great army*, Ezek. xxxvii. 10. *Together with my dead body shall they arise*. If we believe the resurrection of the dead, of our dead bodies at the last day, as Job did, and the prophet here, that will facilitate our belief of the promised restoration of the church's lustre and strength in this world. When God's time shall have come, how low soever she may be brought, they shall arise, even Jerusalem, the city of God, but now lying like a dead body, a carcase to which the eagles are gathered together. God owns it still for his, so does the prophet; but it shall arise, shall be rebuilt, and flourish again. And therefore let the poor, desolate, melancholy remains of its inhabitants, that dwell as in dust, *awake and sing*; for they shall see Jerusalem, the city of their solemnities, a quiet habitation again, ch. xxxiii. 20. The dew of God's favour shall be to it as the evening dew to the herbs that were parched with the heat of the sun all day, shall revive and refresh them. And as the spring-dews, that water the earth, and make the herbs that lay buried in it to put forth and bud, so shall they flourish again, and *the earth shall cast out the dead*, as it casts the herbs out of their roots. The earth, in which they seemed to be lost, shall contribute to their revival. When the church and her interests are to be restored neither the dew of heaven nor the fatness of the earth shall be wanting to do their part towards the restoration. Now this (as Ezekiel's vision, which is a comment upon it) may be fitly accommodated, (1.) To the spiritual resurrection of those that were dead in sin, by the power



of Christ's gospel and grace. So Dr. Lightfoot applies it, *Hor. Hebr. in Joh. xii.* 24. "The Gentiles shall live; with my body shall they arise; that is, they shall be called in after Christ's resurrection, shall rise with him, and sit with him in heavenly places; nay, they shall arise my body (says he); they shall become the mystical body of Christ, and shall arise as part of him." (2.) To the last resurrection, when dead saints shall live, and rise together with Christ's dead body; for he arose as the first-fruits, and believers shall arise by virtue of their union with him and their communion in his resurrection.

20 Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be over-past. 21 For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain.

These two verses are supposed not to belong to the song which takes up the rest of the chapter, but to begin a new matter, and to be rather an introduction to the following chapter than the conclusion of this. Or whereas, in the foregoing song, the people of God had spoken to him, complaining of their grievances, here he returns an answer to their complaints, in which,

I. He invites them into their chambers (v. 20): "*Come, my people, come to me, come with me*" (he calls them nowhere but where he himself will accompany them); "let the storm that disperses others bring you nearer together. Come, and enter into thy chambers; stay not abroad, lest you be caught in the storm, as the Egyptians in the hail," Exod. ix. 21. 1. "Come into chambers of distinction; come into your own apartments, and continue not any longer mixed with the children of Babylon. *Come out from among them, and be you separate,*" 2 Cor. vi. 17; Rev. xviii. 4. If God has set apart those that are godly for himself, they ought to set themselves apart. 2. "Into chambers of defence, in which by the secrecy or the strength of them you may be safe in the worst of times." The attributes of God are the secret of his tabernacle, Ps. xxvii. 5. His name is a strong tower, into which we may run for shelter, Prov. xviii. 10. We must by faith find a way into these chambers, and there hide ourselves; that is, with a holy security and serenity of mind, we must put ourselves under the divine protection. Come, as Noah into the ark, for he shut the doors about him. When dangers are threatening it is good to retire, and lie hid, as Elijah did by the brook Cherith. 3. Into chambers of devotion. "Enter into thy closet,

and shut thy door, Matt. vi. 6. Be private with God: *Enter into thy chamber, to examine thyself, and commune with thy own heart, to pray, and humble thyself before God.*" This work is to be done in times of distress and danger; and thus we hide ourselves, that is, we recommend ourselves to God to hide us, and he will hide us either under heaven or in heaven. Israel must keep within doors when the destroying angel is slaying the first-born of Egypt, else the blood on the door-posts will not secure them. So must Rahab and her family when Jericho is being destroyed. Those are most safe that are least seen. *Qui bene latuit, bene vixit*—He has lived well who has sought a proper degree of concealment.

II. He assures them that the trouble would be over in a very short time, that they should not long be in any fright or peril: "*Hide thyself for a moment, the smallest part of time we can conceive, like an atom of matter; nay, if you can imagine one moment shorter than another, it is but for a little moment, and that with a quasi too, as it were for a little moment, less than you think of. When it is over it will seem as nothing to you; you will wonder how soon it is gone. You shall not need to lie long in confinement, long in concealment. The indignation will presently be over-past; that is, the indignation of the enemies against you, their persecuting power and rage, which force you to abscond. When the wicked rise, a man is hid. This will soon be over; God will cut them off, will break their power, defeat their purposes, and find a way for your enlargement.*" When Athanasius was banished from Alexandria by an edict of Julian, and his friends greatly lamented it, he bade them be of good cheer. *Nubecula est quæ cito pertransibit—It is a little cloud, that will soon blow over. You shall have tribulation ten days; that is all, Rev. ii. 10.* This enables God's suffering people to call their afflictions light, that they are but for a moment.

III. He assures them that their enemies should be reckoned with for all the mischief they had done them by the sword, either of war or persecution, v. 21. The Lord will punish them for the blood they have shed. Here is, 1. The judgment set, and process issued out: *The Lord comes out of his place, to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity, in giving such disturbance to all about them. There is a great deal of iniquity among the inhabitants of the earth; but though they all combine in it, though band join in hand to carry it on, yet it shall not go unpunished.* Besides the everlasting punishment into which the wicked shall go hereafter, there are often remarkable punishments of cruelty, oppression, and persecution, in this world. When men's indignation is over-past, and they have done their worst, let them then expect God's indignation, for *he sees that his day is coming, Ps. xxxvii. 13.*

God comes out of his place to punish. He shows himself in an extraordinary manner from heaven, the firmament of his power, from the sanctuary, the residence of his grace. He is raised up out of his holy habitation, where he seemed before to conceal himself; and now he will do something great, the product of his wise, just, and secret counsels, as a prince that goes to take the chair or take the field, Zech. ii. 13. Some observe that God's place is the mercy-seat; there he delights to be; when he punishes he comes out of his place, for he has no pleasure in the death of sinners. 2. The criminals convicted by the notorious evidence of the fact: *The earth shall disclose her blood*; the innocent blood, the blood of the saints and martyrs, which has been shed upon the earth like water, and has soaked into it, and been concealed and covered by it, shall now be brought to light, and brought to account; for God will make inquisition for it, and will give those that shed it blood to drink, for they are worthy. Secret murders, and other secret wickednesses, shall be discovered, sooner or later. And the slain which the earth has long covered she shall no longer cover, but they shall be produced as evidence against the murderers. The voice of Abel's blood cries from the earth, Gen. iv. 10, 11; Job xx. 27. Those sins which seemed to be buried in oblivion will be called to mind, and called over again, when the day of reckoning comes. Let God's people therefore wait awhile with patience, for behold the Judge stands before the door.

## CHAP. XXVII.

In this chapter the prophet goes on to show, I. What great things God would do for his church and people, which should now shortly be accomplished in the deliverance of Jerusalem from Sennacherib and the destruction of the Assyrian army; but it is expressed generally, for the encouragement of the church in after ages, with reference to the power and prevalency of her enemies. 1. That proud oppressors should be reckoned with, ver. 1. 2. That care should be taken of the church, as of God's vineyard, ver. 2, 3. 3. That God would let fall his controversy with the people, upon their return to him, ver. 4, 5. 4. That he would greatly multiply and increase them, ver. 6. 5. That, as to their afflictions, the property of them should be altered (ver. 7), they should be mitigated and moderated (ver. 8), and sanctified, ver. 9. 6. That though the church might be laid waste, and made desolate, for a time (ver. 10, 11), yet it should be restored, and the scattered members should be gathered together again, ver. 12, 13. All this is applicable to the grace of the gospel, and God's promises to, and providences concerning, the Christian church, and such as belong to it.

**I**N that day the LORD with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent, and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea. 2 In that day sing ye unto her, A vineyard of red wine. 3 I the LORD do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day. 4 Fury is not in me: who would set the briers and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together. 5 Or let him take

hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me. 6 He shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root: Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit.

The prophet is here singing of judgment and mercy,

I. Of judgment upon the enemies of God's church (v. 1), *tribulation to those that trouble it*, 2 Thess. i. 6. When the Lord comes out of his place, to punish the inhabitants of the earth (ch. xxvi. 21), he will be sure to punish leviathan, the dragon that is in the sea, every proud oppressing tyrant, that is the terror of the mighty, and, like the leviathan, is so fierce that none dares stir him up, and his heart as hard as a stone, and when he raises up himself the mighty are afraid, Job xli. 10, 24, 25. The church has many enemies, but commonly some one that is more formidable than the rest. So Sennacherib was in his day, and Nebuchadnezzar in his, and Antiochus in his; so Pharaoh had been formerly, and is called leviathan and the dragon, ch. li. 9; Ps. lxxiv. 13, 14; Ezek. xxix. 3. The New-Testament church has had its leviathans; we read of a great red dragon ready to devour it, Rev. xii. 3. Those malignant persecuting powers are here compared to the leviathan for bulk, and strength, and the mighty bustle they make in the world,—to dragons for their rage and fury,—to serpents, *piercing serpents*, penetrating in their counsels, quick in their motions, and which, if they once get in their head, will soon wind in their whole body,—*crossing like a bar* (so the margin), standing in the way of all their neighbours and obstructing them,—to *crooked serpents*, subtle and insinuating, but perverse and mischievous. Great and mighty princes, if they oppose the people of God, are in God's account as dragons and serpents, the plagues of mankind; and the Lord will punish them in due time. They are too big for men to deal with and call to an account, and therefore the great God will take the matter into his own hands. He has a *sore, and great, and strong sword*, wherewith to do execution upon them when the *measure of their iniquity is full* and their day has come to fall. It is emphatically expressed in the original: *The Lord with his sword, that cruel one, and that great one, and that strong one, shall punish* this unwieldy, this unruly criminal; and it shall be capital punishment: *He shall slay the dragon that is in the sea*; for the wages of his sin is death. This shall not only be a prevention of his doing further mischief, as the slaying of a wild beast, but a just punishment for the mischief he has done, as the putting of a traitor or rebel to death. God has a strong sword for the doing of this, variety of judgments sufficient to humble the proudest and break



the most powerful of his enemies; and he will do it when the day of execution comes: *In that day* he will punish, his day which is coming, Ps. xxxvii. 13. This is applicable to the spiritual victories obtained by our Lord Jesus over the powers of darkness. He not only disarmed, spoiled, and cast out, the prince of this world, but with his strong sword, the virtue of his death and the preaching of his gospel, he does and will *destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil*, that great leviathan, that old serpent, the dragon. He shall be bound, that he may not deceive the nations, and that is a punishment to him (Rev. xx. 2, 3); and at length, for deceiving the nations, he shall be *cast into the lake of fire*, Rev. xx. 10.

II. Of mercy to the church. In that same day, when God is punishing the leviathan, let the church and all her friends be easy and cheerful; let those that attend her sing to her for her comfort, sing her asleep with these assurances; let it be sung in her assemblies,

1. That she is God's vineyard, and is under his particular care, v. 2, 3. She is, in God's eye, *a vineyard of red wine*. The world is as a fruitless worthless wilderness; but the church is enclosed as a vineyard, a peculiar place, and of value, that has great care taken of it and great pains taken with it, and from which precious fruits are gathered, wherewith they honour God and man. It is a vineyard of *red wine*, yielding the best and choicest grapes, intimating the reformation of the church, that it now brings forth good fruit unto God, whereas before it brought forth fruit to itself, or brought forth wild grapes, *ch. v. 4*. Now God takes care, (1.) Of the safety of this vineyard: *I the Lord do keep it*. He speaks this as glorying in it that he is, and has undertaken to be, the keeper of Israel. Those that bring forth fruit to God are and shall be always under his protection. He speaks this as assuring us that they shall be so: *I the Lord, that can do every thing, but cannot lie nor deceive, I do keep it; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day*. God's vineyard in this world lies much exposed to injury; there are many that would hurt it, would tread it down and lay it waste (Ps. lxxx. 13); but God will suffer no real hurt or damage to be done it, but what he will bring good out of. He will keep it constantly, night and day, and not without need, for the enemies are restless in their designs and attempts against it, and, both night and day, seek an opportunity to do it a mischief. God will keep it in the night of affliction and persecution, and in the day of peace and prosperity, the temptations of which are no less dangerous. God's people shall be preserved, not only from the *pestilence that walketh in darkness*, but from the *destruction that wasteth at noon-day*, Ps. xci. 6. This vineyard shall be well fenced. (2.) Of the

fruitfulness of this vineyard: *I will water it every moment*, and yet it shall not be over-watered. The still and silent dews of God's grace and blessing shall continually descend upon it, that it may bring forth much fruit. We need the constant and continual waterings of the divine grace; for, if that be at any time withdrawn, we wither, and come to nothing. God waters his vineyard by the ministry of the word by his servants the prophets, whose doctrine shall drop as the dew. Paul plants, and Apollos waters, but God gives the increase; for without him the watchman wakes and the husbandman waters in vain.

2. That, though sometimes he contends with his people, yet, upon their submission, he will be reconciled to them, v. 4, 5. *Fury is not in him* towards his vineyard; though he meets with many things in it that are offensive to him, yet he does not seek advantages against it, nor is extreme to mark what is amiss in it. It is true if he find in it briars and thorns instead of vines, and they be set in battle against him (as indeed that in the vineyard which is not for him is against him), he will tread them down and burn them; but otherwise, "If I am angry with my people, they know what course to take; let them humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and so *take hold of my strength* with a sincere desire to make their peace with me, and I will soon be reconciled to them, and all shall be well." God sees the sins of his people and is displeased with them; but, upon their repentance, he turns away his wrath. This may very well be construed as a summary of the doctrine of the gospel, with which the church is to be watered every moment. (1.) Here is a quarrel supposed between God and man; for here is a battle fought, and peace to be made. It is an old quarrel, ever since sin first entered. It is, on God's part, a righteous quarrel, but, on man's part, most unrighteous. (2.) Here is a gracious invitation given us to make up this quarrel, and to get these matters in variance accommodated: "Let him that is desirous to be at peace with God take hold of his strength, of his strong arm, which is lifted up against the sinner to strike him dead; and let him by supplication keep back the stroke. Let him wrestle with me, as Jacob did, resolving not to let me go without a blessing; and he shall be *Israel—a prince with God*." Pardoning mercy is called the power of our Lord; let him take hold of that. Christ is the *arm of the Lord*, *ch. liii. 1*. Christ *crucified is the power of God* (1 Cor. i. 24); let him by a lively faith take hold of him, as a man that is sinking catches hold of a bough, or cord, or plank, that is within his reach, or as the malefactor took hold of the horns of the altar, believing that there is no other name by which he can be saved, by which he can be reconciled. (3.) Here is a threefold cord of arguments

to persuade us to do this. [1.] Time and space are given us to do it in; for *fury is not in God*; he does not carry it towards us as great men carry it towards their inferiors, when the one is in a fault and the other in a fury. Men in a fury will not take time for consideration; it is, with them, but a word and a blow. Furious men are soon angry, and implacable when they are angry; a little thing provokes them, and no little thing will pacify them. But it is not so with God; he considers our frame, is slow to anger, does not stir up all his wrath, nor always chide. [2.] It is in vain to think of contesting with him. If we persist in our quarrel with him, and think to make our part good, it is but like setting briars and thorns before a consuming fire, which will be so far from giving check to the progress of it that they will but make it burn the more outrageously. We are not an equal match for Omnipotence. *Woe unto him therefore that strives with his Maker!* He knows not the power of his anger. [3.] This is the only way, and it is a sure way, to reconciliation: "Let him take this course to make peace with me, *and he shall make peace*; and thereby good, all good, shall come unto him." God is willing to be reconciled to us if we be but willing to be reconciled to him.

3. That the church of God in the world shall be a growing body, and come at length to be a great body (v. 6): *In times to come* (so some read it), *in after-times*, when these calamities are overpast, or in the days of the gospel, the latter days, *he shall cause Jacob to take root*, deeper root than ever yet; for the gospel church shall be more firmly fixed than ever the Jewish church was, and shall spread further. Or, *He shall cause those of Jacob that come back out of their captivity, or (as we read it) those that come of Jacob, to take root downward, and bear fruit upward*, ch. xxxvii. 31. They shall be established in a prosperous state, and then they shall *blossom and bud*, and give hopeful prospects of a great increase; and so it shall prove, for *they shall fill the face of the world with fruit*. Many shall be brought into the church, proselytes shall be numerous, some out of all the nations about that shall be to the God of Israel for a name and a praise; and the converts shall be fruitful in the fruits of righteousness. The preaching of the gospel brought forth fruit in all the world (Col. i. 6), fruit that remains, John xv. 16.

7 Hath he smitten him, as he smote those that smote him? Or is he slain according to the slaughter of them that are slain by him? 8 In measure, when it shooteth forth, thou wilt debate with it: he stayeth his rough wind in the day of the east-wind. 9

By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged; and this *is* all the fruit to take away his sin; when he maketh all the stones of the altar as chalk-stones that are beaten in sunder, the groves and images shall not stand up. 10 Yet the defenced city *shall be* desolate, *and* the habitation forsaken, and left like a wilderness: there shall the calf feed, and there shall he lie down, and consume the branches thereof. 11 When the boughs thereof are withered, they shall be broken off: the women come, *and* set them on fire: for it *is* a people of no understanding: therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will show them no favour. 12 And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the LORD shall beat off from the channel of the river unto the stream of Egypt, and ye shall be gathered one by one, O ye children of Israel. 13 And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the LORD in the holy mount at Jerusalem.

Here is the prophet again singing of mercy and judgment, not, as before, judgment to the enemies and mercy to the church, but judgment to the church and mercy mixed with that judgment.

1. Here is judgment threatened even to Jacob and Israel. *They shall blossom and bud* (v. 6), but, 1. They shall be *smitten and slain* (v. 7), some of them shall. If God find any thing amiss among them, he will lay them under the tokens of his displeasure for it. Judgment shall begin at the house of God, and those whom God has known of all the families of the earth he will punish in the first place. 2. Jerusalem, *their defenced city, shall be desolate*, v. 10, 11. "God having tried a variety of methods with them for their reformation, which, as to many, have proved ineffectual, he will for a time lay their country waste," which was accomplished when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Chaldeans; then that *habitation* was for a long time *forsaken*. If less judgments do not do the work, God will send greater; for *when he judges he will overcome*. Jerusalem had been a defenced city, not so much by art or nature as by grace and the divine protection; but, when God was provoked to



withdraw, her defence departed from her, and then she was left like a wilderness. "And in the pleasant gardens of Jerusalem cattle shall feed, shall lie down there, and there shall be none to disturb them or drive them away; there they shall be *levant and couchant*, and they shall eat the tender branches of the fruit-trees," which perhaps further signifies that the people should become an easy prey to their enemies. "*When the boughs thereof are withered* as they grow upon the tree, being blasted by winds and frosts and not pruned, *they shall be broken off for fuel, and the women and children shall come and set them on fire.* There shall be a total destruction, for the very trees shall be destroyed." And this is a figure of the deplorable state of the vineyard (v. 2) when it brought forth wild grapes (ch. v. 2); and our Saviour seems to refer to this when he says of the branches of the vine which *abide not in him* that they are *cast forth and withered, and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned* (John xv. 6), which was in a particular manner fulfilled in the unbelieving Jews. The similitude is explained in the following words, *It is a people of no understanding*, brutish and sottish, and destitute of the knowledge of God, and that have no relish or savour of divine things, like a withered branch that has no sap in it; and this is at the bottom of all those sins for which God left them desolate, their idolatry first and afterwards their infidelity. Wicked people, however in other things they may be wits and politicians, in their greatest concerns are of no understanding; and their ignorance, being wilful, shall not only not be their excuse, but it shall be the ground of their condemnation; for therefore *he that made them*, that gave them their being, *will not have mercy on them*, nor save them from the ruin they bring upon themselves; and *he that formed them* into a people, formed them for himself, to show forth his praise, seeing they do not answer the end of their formation, but hate to be reformed, to be new-formed, will reject them, and *show them no favour*; and then they are undone: for, if he that made us by his power do not make us happy in his favour, we had better never have been made. Sinners flatter themselves with hopes of impunity, at least that they shall not be dealt with so severely as their ministers tell them, because God is merciful and because he is their Maker. But here we see how weak and insufficient those pleas will be; for, if they be of no understanding, he that made them, though he made them, and hates nothing that he has made, and though he has mercy in store for those who so far understand their interests as to apply to him for it, yet on them he will have no mercy, and will show them no favour.

II. Here is a great deal of mercy mixed with this judgment; for there are good peo-

ple mixed with those that are corrupt and degenerate, *a remnant according to the election of grace*, on whom God will have mercy and to whom he will show favour: and these promises seem to point at all the calamities of the church, for which God would graciously provide these allays.

1. Though they shall be smitten and slain, yet not to that degree, and in that manner, in which their enemies shall be smitten and slain, v. 7. God has *smitten Jacob*, and he is slain. Many of those *that understand among the people shall fall by the sword and by flame many days*, Dan. xi. 33. But it shall not be as those are smitten and slain, (1.) Who smote him formerly, who were the rod of God's anger and the staff in his hand, which he made use of for the correction of his people, and to whose turn it shall come to be reckoned with even for that: the child is spared, but the rod is burnt. (2.) Who shall afterwards be slain by him, when he shall get the dominion, and repay them in their own coin, or slain for his sake in the pleading of his cause. God's people and God's enemies are here represented, [1.] As struggling with each other; so the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent have been, are, and will be. In this contest there are slain on both sides. God makes use of wicked men, not only to smite, but to slay his people; for they are his sword, Ps. xvii. 13. But, when the cup of trembling comes to be put into their hand, it will be much worse with them than ever it was with God's people in their greatest straits. The seed of the woman has only his heel bruised, but the serpent has his head crushed and broken. Note, Though God's persecuted people may be great losers, and great sufferers, for a while, yet those that oppress them will prove to be greater losers and greater sufferers at last, here or hereafter; for God will render double to them, Rev. xviii. 6. [2.] As sharing together in the calamities of this present time. They are both smitten, both slain, and both by the hand of God; for there is *one event to the righteous and to the wicked*. But is Jacob smitten as his enemies are? No, by no means; to him the property is altered, and it becomes quite another thing. Note, However it may seem to us, there is really a vast difference between the afflictions and deaths of good people and the afflictions and deaths of wicked people.

2. Though God will debate with them, yet it shall be in measure, and the affliction shall be mitigated, moderated, and proportioned to their strength, not to their deserts, v. 8. He will deal out afflictions to them as the wise physician prescribes medicines to his patients, just such a quantity of each ingredient, or orders how much blood shall be taken when a vein is opened: thus God orders the troubles of his people, not *suffering them to be tempted above what they are able*

1 Cor. x. 13. He measures out their afflictions by a little at a time, that they may not be pressed above measure; for he knows their frame, and corrects in judgment, and does not stir up all his wrath. When the affliction is shooting forth, when he is sending it out and giving it its commission, then he debates in measure, and not in extremity. He considers what we can bear when he begins to correct; and when he proceeds in his controversy, so that it is the *day of his east-wind*, which is not only blustering and noisy, but blasting and noxious, yet he stays his rough wind, checks it, and sets bounds to it, does not suffer it to blow so hard as was feared; when he is winnowing his corn, it is with a gentle gale, that shall only blow away the chaff, but not the good corn. God has the winds at his command, and every affliction under his check. *Hitherto it shall go, but no further.* Let us not despair when things are at the worst; be the winds ever so rough, ever so high, God can say unto them, *Peace, be still.*

3. Though God will afflict them, yet he will make their afflictions to work for the good of their souls, and correct them as the father does the child, to drive out the foolishness that is bound up in their hearts (v. 9): *By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged.* This is the design of the affliction, to this it is adapted as a proper means, and, by the grace of God working with it, it shall have this blessed effect. It shall mortify the habits of sin; by this those defilements of the soul shall be purged away. It shall break them off from the practice of sin: *This is all the fruit*, this is it that God intends, this is all the harm it will do them, *to take away their sin*, than which they could not have a greater kindness done them, though it be at the expense of an affliction. Therefore, because the affliction is mitigated and moderated, and the rough wind stayed, therefore we may conclude that he designs their reformation, not their destruction; and, because he deals thus gently with us, we should therefore study to answer his ends in afflicting us. The particular sin which the affliction was intended to cure them of was the sin of idolatry, the sin which did most easily beset that people and to which they were strangely addicted. *Ephraim is joined to idols.* But by the captivity in Babylon they were not only weaned from this sin, but set against it. *Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?* Jacob has his sin taken away, his beloved sin, *when he makes all the stones of the altar, of his idolatrous altar, the stones of which were precious and sacred to him, as chalk-stones that are beaten asunder*; he not only has them in contempt, and values them no more than chalk-stones, but he conceives an indignation at them, and, in a holy revenge, beats them asunder as easily as chalk-stones are broken to pieces. *The groves and the*

*images shall not stand before this penitent, but they shall be thrown down too, never to be set up again.* This was according to the law for the demolishing and destroying of all the monuments of idolatry (Deut. vii. 5); and according to this promise, since the captivity in Babylon, no people in the world have such a rooted aversion to idols and idolatry as the people of the Jews. Note, The design of affliction is to separate between us and sin, especially that which has been *our own iniquity*; and then it appears that the affliction has done us good when we keep at a distance from the occasions of sin, and use all needful precaution that we may not only not relapse into it, but not so much as be tempted to it, Ps. cxix. 67.

4. Though Jerusalem shall be desolate and forsaken for a time, yet there will come a day when its scattered friends shall resort to it again out of all the countries whither they were dispersed (v. 12, 13); though the body of the nation is abandoned as a people of no understanding, yet those that are indeed children of Israel shall be gathered together again, as the sheep of the flock when the shepherds that scattered them are reckoned with, Ezek. xxxiv. 10—19. Now observe concerning these scattered Israelites, (1.) Whence they shall be fetched: *The Lord shall beat them off as fruit from the tree, or beat them out as corn out of the ear.* He shall find them out, and separate them from those among whom they dwelt, and with whom they seemed to be incorporated, *from the channel of the river Euphrates north-east, unto Nile, the stream of Egypt*, which lay south-west—those that were driven into the land of Assyria, and were captives there in the land of their enemies, where they were ready to perish for want of necessities, and ready to despair of deliverance—and those that were *outcasts in the land of Egypt*, whither many of those that were left behind, after the captivity in Babylon, went, contrary to God's express command (Jer. xliii. 6, 7), and there lived as outcasts: God has mercy in store for them all, and will make it to appear that, though they are cast out, they are not cast off. (2.) In what manner they shall be brought back: *"You shall be gathered one by one, not in multitudes, not in troops forcing your way; but silently, and as it were by stealth, dropping in, first one, and then another."* This intimates that the remnant that shall be saved consists but of few, and those saved with difficulty, and so as by fire, scarcely saved; they shall not come for company, but as God shall stir up every man's spirit. (3.) By what means they shall be gathered together: *The great trumpet shall be blown, and then they shall come.* Cyrus's proclamation of liberty to the captives is this great trumpet, which awakened the Jews that were asleep in their thralldom to bestir themselves; it was like the sounding of the jubilee-trumpet, which



published the year of release. This is applicable both to the preaching of the gospel, by which sinners are gathered in to the grace of God, such as were outcasts and ready to perish (those that were afar off are made nigh; the gospel proclaims the acceptable year of the Lord), and also to the archangel's trumpet at the last day, by which saints shall be gathered to the glory of God, that lay as outcasts in their graves. (4.) For what end they shall be gathered together: *To worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem.* When the captives rallied again, and returned to their own land, the chief thing they had their eye upon, and the first thing they applied themselves to, was the worship of God. The holy temple was in ruins, but they had the holy mount, *the place of the altar*, Gen. xiii. 4. Liberty to worship God is the most valuable and desirable liberty; and, after restraints and dispersions, a free access to his house should be more welcome to us than a free access to our own houses. Those that are gathered by the sounding of the gospel trumpet are brought in to worship God and added to the church; and the great trumpet of all will gather the saints together, *to serve God day and night in his temple.*

## CHAP. XXVIII.

In this chapter, I. The Ephraimites are reproved and threatened for their pride and drunkenness, their security and sensuality, ver. 1—8. But, in the midst of this, here is a gracious promise of God's favour to the remnant of his people, ver. 5—6. II. They are likewise reproved and threatened for their dulness and stupidity, and unaptness to profit by the instructions which the prophets gave them in God's name, ver. 9—13. III. The rulers of Jerusalem are reproved and threatened for their insolent contempt of God's judgments, and setting them at defiance; and, after a gracious promise of Christ and his grace, they are made to know that the vain hopes of escaping the judgments of God with which they flattered themselves would certainly deceive them, ver. 14—22. IV. All this is confirmed by a comparison borrowed from the method which the husbandman takes with his ground and grain, according to which they must expect God would proceed with his people, whom he had lately called his threshing and the corn of his floor (ch. xxi. 10) ver. 23—29. This is written for our admonition, and is profitable for reproof and warning to us.

**W**OE to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty *is* a fading flower, which *are* on the head of the fat valleys of them that are overcome with wine! 2 Behold, the Lord hath a mighty and strong one, *which* as a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, as a flood of mighty waters overflowing, shall cast down to the earth with the hand. 3 The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim, shall be trodden under feet: 4 And the glorious beauty, which *is* on the head of the fat valley, shall be a fading flower, *and* as the hasty fruit before the summer; which *when* he that looketh upon it seeth, while it is yet in his hand, he eateth it up. 5 In that day shall the Lord of hosts be

for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of his people, 6 And for a spirit of judgment to him that sitteth in judgment, and for strength to them that turn the battle to the gate. 7 But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble *in* judgment. 8 For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, *so that there is no place clean.*

Here, I. The prophet warns the kingdom of the ten tribes of the judgments that were coming upon them for their sins, which were soon after executed by the king of Assyria, who laid their country waste, and carried the people into captivity. Ephraim had his name from *fruitfulness*, their soil being very fertile and the products of it abundant and the best of the kind; they had a great many *fat valleys* (v. 1, 4), and Samaria, which was situated on a hill, was, as it were, *on the head of the fat valleys*. Their country was rich and pleasant, and as the garden of the Lord: it was the glory of Canaan, as that was the glory of all lands; their harvest and vintage were the *glorious beauty* on the head of their valleys, which were covered over with corn and vines. Now observe,

1. What an ill use they made of their plenty. What God gave them to serve him with they perverted, and abused, by making it the food and fuel of their lusts. (1.) They were puffed up with pride by it. The goodness with which God crowned their years, which should have been to him a crown of praise, was to them a *crown of pride*. Those that are rich in the world are apt to be high-minded, 1 Tim. vi. 17. Their king, who wore the crown, was proud that he ruled over so rich a country; Samaria, their royal city, was notorious for pride. Perhaps it was usual at their festivals, or revels, to wear garlands made up of flowers and ears of corn, which they wore in honour of their fruitful country. Pride was a sin that generally prevailed among them, and therefore the prophet, in his name who resists the proud, boldly proclaims a *woe to the crown of pride*. If those who wear crowns be proud of them, let them not think to escape this woe. What men are proud of, be it ever so mean, is to them as a crown; he that is proud thinks himself as great as a king. But woe to those who thus exalt themselves, for they shall be abased; their pride is the preface to their destruction. (2.) They indulged themselves in sensuality.

Ephraim was notorious for drunkenness, and excess of riot; Samaria, the head of the fat valleys, was full of those that were overcome with wine, were broken with it, so the margin. See how foolishly drunkards act, and no marvel when, in the very commission of the sin, they make fools and brutes of themselves; they yield, [1.] To be conquered by the sin; it overcomes them, and brings them into bondage (2 Pet. ii. 19); they are led captive by it, and the captivity is the more shameful and inglorious because it is voluntary. Some of these wretched slaves have themselves owned that there is not a greater drudgery in the world than hard drinking. They are overcome not with the wine, but with the love of it. [2.] To be ruined by it. They are broken by wine. Their constitution is broken by it, and their health ruined. They are broken in their callings and estates, and their families are brought to ruin by it. Their peace with God is broken, and their souls are in danger of being eternally undone, and all this for the gratification of a base lust. Woe to these drunkards of Ephraim! Ministers must bring the general woes of the world home to particular places and persons. We must say, *Woe to drunkards*; their condition is a woeful condition, their brutish pleasures are to be pitied, and not envied; *they shall not inherit the kingdom of God* (1 Cor. vi. 10); the curse is in force against them, Deut. xxix. 19, 20. Nay, we must go further, and say, *Woe to the drunkards of such a place*, that they may hear and fear; nay, and, *Woe to this or that person*, if he be a drunkard. There is a particular woe to the drunkards of Ephraim, for they are of God's professing people, and it becomes them worse than any other; they know better, and therefore should give a better example. Some make the crown of pride to belong to the drunkards, and to mean the garlands with which those were crowned that got the victory in their wicked drinking matches and drank down the rest of the company. They were proud of their being mighty to drink wine; but woe to those who thus glory in their shame.

2. The justice of God in taking away their plenty from them, which they thus abused. Their glorious beauty, the plenty they were proud of, is but a fading flower; it is meat that perishes. The most substantial fruits, if God blast them and blow upon them, are but fading flowers, v. 1. God can easily take away their corn in the season thereof (Hos. ii. 9), and recover locum vastatum—ground that has been alienated and has run to waste, those goods of his which they prepared for Baal. God has an officer ready to make a seizure for him, has one at his beck, a mighty and strong one, who is able to do the business, even the king of Assyria, who shall cast down to the earth with the hand, shall easily and effectually, and with the turn of a hand, destroy all that

which they are proud of and pleased with, v. 2. He shall throw it down to the ground, to be broken to pieces with a strong hand, with a hand that they cannot oppose. Then the crown of pride, and the drunkards of Ephraim, shall be trodden under foot (v. 3); they shall lie exposed to contempt, and shall not be able to recover themselves. Drunkards, in their folly, are apt to talk proudly, and vaunt themselves most when they most shame themselves; but they thereby render themselves the more ridiculous. The beauty of their valleys, which they gloried in, will be, (1.) Like a fading flower (as before, v. 1); it will wither of itself, and has in itself the principles of its own corruption; it will perish in time by its own moth and rust. (2.) Like the hasty fruit, which, as soon as it is discovered, is plucked and eaten up; so the wealth of this world, besides that it is apt to decay of itself, is subject to be devoured by others as greedily as the first-ripe fruit, which is earnestly desired, Mic. vii. 1. Thieves break through and steal. The harvest which the worldling is proud of the hungry eat up (Job v. 5); no sooner do they see the prey but they catch at it, and swallow up all they can lay their hands on. It is likewise easily devoured, as that fruit which, being ripe before it has grown, is very small, and is soon eaten up; and there being little of it, and that of little worth, it is not reserved, but used immediately.

II. He next turns to the kingdom of Judah, whom he calls the residue of his people (v. 5), for they were but two tribes to the other ten.

1. He promises them God's favours, and that they shall be taken under his guidance and protection when the beauty of Ephraim shall be left exposed to be trodden down and eaten up, v. 5, 6. In that day, when the Assyrian army is laying Israel waste, and Judah might think that their neighbour's house being on fire their own was in danger, in that day of treading down and perplexity, then God will be to the residue of his people all they need and can desire; not only to the kingdom of Judah, but to those of Israel who had kept their integrity, and, as was probably the case with some, betook themselves to the land of Judah, to be sheltered by good king Hezekiah. When the Assyrian, that mighty one, was in Israel as a tempest of hail, noisy and battering, as a destroying storm bearing down all before it, especially at sea, and as a flood of mighty waters overflowing the country (v. 2), then in that day will the Lord of hosts, of all hosts, distinguish by peculiar favours his people who have distinguished themselves by a steady and singular adherence to him, and that which they most need he will himself be to them. This very much enhances the worth of the promises that God, covenanting to be to his people a God all-



sufficient, undertakes to be himself all that to them which they can desire. (1.) He will put all the credit and honour upon them which are requisite, not only to rescue them from contempt, but to gain them esteem and reputation. He will be to them *for a crown of glory and for a diadem of beauty*. Those that wore the crown of pride looked upon God's people with disdain, and trampled upon them, for they were the song of the drunkards of Ephraim; but God will so appear for them by his providence as to make it evident that they have his favour towards them, and that shall be to them a crown of glory; for what greater glory can any people have than for God to acknowledge them as his own? And he will so appear in them, by his grace, as to make it evident that they have his image renewed on them, and that shall be to them a diadem of beauty; for what greater beauty can any person have than the beauty of holiness? Note, Those that have God for their God have him for a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty; for they are made to him kings and priests. (2.) He will give them all the wisdom and grace necessary to the due discharge of the duty of their place. He will himself be a *spirit of judgment* to those that sit in judgment; the privy counsellors shall be guided by wisdom and discretion and the judges shall govern by justice and equity. It is a great mercy to any people when those that are called to places of power and public trust are qualified for their places, when those that sit in judgment have a spirit of judgment, a spirit of government. (3.) He will give them all the courage and boldness requisite to carry them resolutely through the difficulties and oppositions they are likely to meet with. He will be *for strength* to those that turn the battle to the gate, to the gates of the enemy whose cities they besiege, or to their own gates, when they sally out upon the enemies that besiege them. The strength of the soldiery depends as much upon God as the wisdom of the magistracy; and where God gives both these he is to that people a crown of glory. This may well be supposed to refer to Christ, and so the Chaldee paraphrast understands it: *In that day shall the Messiah be a crown of glory*. Simeon calls him the *glory of his people Israel*; and he is made of God to us wisdom, righteousness, and strength.

2. He complains of the corruptions that were found among them, and the many corrupt ones (v. 7): *But they also*, many of those of Judah, *have erred through wine*. There are drunkards of Jerusalem, as well as drunkards of Ephraim; and therefore the mercy of God is to be so much the more admired that he has not blasted the glory of Judah as he has done that of Ephraim. Sparing mercy lays us under peculiar obligations when it is thus distinguishing. Ephraim's sins are found in

Judah, and yet not Ephraim's ruins. *They have erred through wine*. Their drinking to excess is itself a practical error; they think to raise their fancy by it, but they ruin their judgment, and so put a cheat upon themselves; they think to preserve their health by it and help digestion, but they spoil their constitution and hasten diseases and deaths. It is also the occasion of a great many errors in principle; their understanding is clouded and their conscience debauched by it; and therefore, to support themselves in it, they espouse corrupt notions, and form their minds in favour of their lusts. Probably some were drawn in to worship idols by their love of the wine and strong drink which there was plenty of at their idolatrous festivals; and so they erred through wine, as Israel, for love of the daughters of Moab, joined themselves to Baal-peor. Three things are here observed as aggravations of this sin:—(1.) That those were guilty of it whose business it was to warn others against it and to teach them better, and therefore who ought to have set a better example: *The priest and the prophet are swallowed up of wine*; their office is quite drowned and lost in it. The priests, as sacrificers, were obliged by a particular law to be temperate (Lev. x. 9), and, as rulers and magistrates, it was not for them to drink wine, Prov. xxxi. 4. The prophets were a kind of Nazarites (as appears by Amos ii. 11), and, as reprovers by office, were concerned to keep at the utmost distance from the sins they reprov'd in others; yet there were many of them ensnared in this sin. What! a priest, a prophet, a minister, and yet drunk! *Tell it not in Gath*. Such a scandal are they to their coat. (2.) That the consequences of it were very pernicious, not only by the ill influence of their example, but the prophet, when he was drunk, *erred in vision*; the false prophets plainly discovered themselves to be so when they were in drink. The priest *stumbled in judgment and forgot the law* (Prov. xxxi. 5); he reeled and staggered as much in the operations of his mind as in the motions of his body. What wisdom or justice can be expected from those that sacrifice reason, and virtue, and conscience, and all that is valuable to such a base lust as the love of strong drink is? Happy art thou, O land! when thy princes eat and drink *for strength, and not for drunkenness*, Eccl. x. 17. (3.) That the disease was epidemic, and the generality of those that kept any thing of a table were infected with it: *All tables are full of vomit*, v. 8. See what an odious thing the sin of drunkenness is, what an affront it is to human society; it is rude and ill-mannered enough to sicken the beholders, for the tables where they eat their meat are filthily stained with the marks of this sin, which the sinners declare as Sodom. Their tables are full of

vomit, so that the victor, instead of being proud of his crown, ought rather to be ashamed of it. It bodes ill to any people when so sottish a sin as drunkenness has become national.

9 Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine? *Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts.* 10 For precept *must be* upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line; here a little, *and* there a little: 11 For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. 12 To whom he said, *This is the rest wherewith* ye may cause the weary to rest; and this *is* the refreshing: yet they would not hear. 13 But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, *and* there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.

The prophet here complains of the wretched stupidity of this people, that they were unteachable and made no improvement of the means of grace which they possessed; they still continued as they were, their mistakes not rectified, their hearts not renewed, nor their lives reformed. Observe,

I. What it was that their prophets and ministers designed and aimed at. It was to *teach* them *knowledge*, the knowledge of God and his will, and to *make them understand doctrine*, v. 9. This is God's way of dealing with men, to enlighten men's minds first with the knowledge of his truth, and thus to gain their affections, and bring their wills into a compliance with his laws; thus he enters in by the door, whereas the thief and the robber climb up another way.

II. What method they took, in pursuance of this design. They left no means untried to do them good, but taught them as children are taught, little children that are beginning to learn, that are taken from the breast to the book (v. 9), for among the Jews it was common for mothers to nurse their children till they were three years old, and almost ready to go to school. And it is good to begin betimes with children, to teach them, as they are capable, the good knowledge of the Lord, and to instruct them even when they are but newly weaned from the milk. The prophets taught them as children are taught; for, 1. They were constant and industrious in teaching them. They took great pains with them, and

with great prudence, teaching them as they needed it and were able to bear it (v. 10): *Precept upon precept. It must be so*, or (as some read) *it has been so*. They have been taught, as children are taught to read, by *precept upon precept*, and taught to write by *line upon line, a little here and a little there*, a little of one thing and a little of another, that the variety of instructions might be pleasing and inviting,—a little at one time and a little at another, that they might not have their memories overcharged,—a little from one prophet and a little from another, that every one might be pleased with his friend and him whom he admired. Note, For our instruction in the things of God it is requisite that we have precept upon precept and line upon line, that one precept and line should be followed, and so enforced, by another; the precept of justice must be upon the precept of piety, and the precept of charity upon that of justice. Nay, it is necessary that the same precept and the same line should be often repeated and inculcated upon us, that we may the better understand them and the more easily recollect them when we have occasion for them. Teachers should accommodate themselves to the capacity of the learners, give them what they most need and can best bear, and a little at a time, Deut. vi. 6, 7. 2. They courted and persuaded them to learn, v. 12 God, by his prophets, said to them, "*This way that we are directing you to, and directing you in, is the rest, the only rest, wherewith you may cause the weary to rest; and this will be the refreshing of your own souls, and will bring rest to your country from the wars and other calamities with which it has been long harassed.*" Note, God by his word calls us to nothing but what is really for our advantage; for the service of God is the only true rest for those that are weary of the service of sin and there is no refreshing but under the easy yoke of the Lord Jesus.

III. What little effect all this had upon the people. They were as unapt to learn as young children newly weaned from the milk, and it was as impossible to fasten any thing upon them (v. 9): nay, one would choose rather to teach a child of two years old than undertake to teach them; for they have not only (like such a child) no capacity to receive what is taught them, but they are prejudiced against it. As children, they have *need of milk, and cannot bear strong meat*, Heb. v. 12. 1. They would not hear (v. 12), no, not that which would be rest and refreshing to them. They had no mind to hear it. The word of God commanded their serious attention, but could not gain it; they were where it was preached, but they turned a deaf ear to it, or as it came in at one ear it went out at the other. 2. They would not heed. It was unto them *precept upon precept, and line upon line* (v. 13);



they went on in a road of external performances; they kept up the old custom of attending upon the prophet's preaching and it was continually sounding in their ears, but that was all; it made no impression upon them; they had the letter of the precept, but no experience of the power and spirit of it; it was continually beating upon them, but it beat nothing into them. Nay, 3. It should seem, they ridiculed the prophet's preaching, and bantered it. The word of the Lord was unto them *Tsau latsau, kau lakau*; in the original it is in rhyme; they made a song of the prophet's words, and sang it when they were merry over their wine. David was the song of the drunkards. It is great impiety, and a high affront to God, thus to make a jest of sacred things, to speak of that vainly which should make us serious.

IV. How severely God would reckon with them for this. 1. He would deprive them of the privilege of plain preaching, and speak to them *with stammering lips and another tongue*, v. 11. Those that will not understand what is plain and level to their capacity, but despise it as mean and trifling, are justly amused with that which is above them. Or God will send foreign armies among them, whose language they understand not, to lay their country waste. Those that will not hear the comfortable voice of God's word shall be made to hear the dreadful voice of his rod. Or these words may be taken as denoting God's gracious condescension to their capacity in his dealing with them; he lisped to them in their own language, as nurses do to their children, with stammering lips, to humour them; he changed his voice, tried first one way and then another; the apostle quotes it as a favour (1 Cor. xiv. 21), applying it to the gift of tongues, and complaining that yet for all this they would not hear. 2. He would bring utter ruin upon them. By their profane contempt of God and his word they are but hastening on their own ruin, and ripening themselves for it; it is *that they may go and fall backward*, may grow worse and worse, may depart further and further from God, and proceed from one sin to another, till they be quite *broken, and snared, and taken*, and ruined, v. 13. They have here a little and there a little of the word of God; they think it too much, and *say to the seers, See not*; but it proves too little to convert them, and will prove enough to condemn them. If it be not a *savour of life unto life*, it will be a *savour of death unto death*.

14 Wherefore hear the word of the LORD, ye scornful men, that rule this people which *is* in Jerusalem. 15 Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the over-

flowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us; for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves: 16 Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. 17 Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place. 18 And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it. 19 From the time that it goeth forth it shall take you: for morning by morning shall it pass over, by day and by night: and it shall be a vexation only to understand the report. 20 For the bed is shorter than that *a man* can stretch himself *on it*: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself *in it*. 21 For the LORD shall rise up as *in* mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as *in* the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act. 22 Now therefore be ye not mockers, lest your hands be made strong: for I have heard from the Lord God of hosts a consumption, even determined upon the whole earth.

The prophet, having reprov'd those that made a jest of the word of God, here goes on to reprove those that made a jest of the judgments of God, and set them at defiance; for he is a jealous God, and will not suffer either his ordinances or his providences to be brought into contempt. He addresses himself to *the scornful men who ruled in Jerusalem*, who were the magistrates of the city, v. 14. It is bad with a people when their thrones of judgment become the seats of the scornful, when rulers are scorers; but that the rulers of Jerusalem should be men of such a character, that they should make light of God's judgments and scorn to take notice of the tokens of his displeasure, is very sad. Who will be mourners in Zion if they are scorers? Observe,

I. How these scornful men lulled themselves asleep in carnal security, and even challenged God Almighty to do his worst (v.

15) *You have said, We have made a covenant with death and the grave.* They thought themselves as sure of their lives, even when the most destroying judgments were abroad, as if they had made a bargain with death, upon a valuable consideration, not to come till they sent for him or not to take them away by any violence, but by old age. If we be at peace with God, and have made a covenant with him, we have in effect made a covenant with death that it shall come in the fittest time, that, whenever it comes, it shall be no terror to us, nor do us any real damage; death is ours if we be Christ's (1 Cor. iii. 22, 23): but to think of making death our friend, or being in league with it, while by sin we are making God our enemy and are at war with him, is the greatest absurdity that can be. It was a fond conceit which these scorers had, "*When the overflowing scourge shall pass through our country, and others shall fall under it, yet it shall not come to us, not reach us, though it extend far, not bear us down, though it is an overflowing scourge.*" It is the greatest folly imaginable for impenitent sinners to think that either in this world or the other they shall fare better than their neighbours. But what is the ground of their confidence? Why, truly, *We have made lies our refuge.* Either, 1. Those things which the prophets told them would be lies and falsehood to them and would deceive, but which they themselves looked upon as substantial fences. The protection of their idols, the promises with which their false prophets soothed them, their policy, their wealth, their interest in the people; these they confided in, and not in God; nay, these they confided in against God. Or, 2. Those things which should be lies and falsehood to the enemy, who was *flagellum Dei*—the scourge of God, the overflowing scourge; they would secure themselves by imposing upon the enemy with their stratagems of war, or their feigned submissions in treaties of peace. The rest of the cities of Judah were taken because they made an obstinate defence; but the rulers of Jerusalem hope to succeed better. They think themselves greater politicians than those of the country towns; they will compliment the king of Assyria with a promise to surrender their city, or to become tributaries to him, with a purpose at the same time to shake off his yoke as soon as the danger is over, not caring though they be found liars to him, as the expression is, Deut. xxxiii. 29. Note, Those put a cheat upon themselves that think to gain their point by putting cheats upon those they deal with. Those that pursue their designs by trick and fraud, by mean and paltry shifts, may perhaps compass them, but cannot expect comfort in them. Honesty is the best policy. But such refuges as these are those driven to that depart from God, and throw themselves out of his protection.

II. How God, by the prophet, awakens them out of this sleep, and shows them the folly of their security.

1. He tells them upon what grounds they might be secure. He does not disturb their false confidences, till he has first shown them a firm bottom on which they may repose themselves (v. 16): *Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone.* This foundation is, (1.) The promises of God in general—his word, upon which he has caused his people to hope—his covenant with Abraham, that he would be a God to him and his; this is a foundation, a foundation of stone, firm and lasting, for faith to build upon; it is a *tried stone*, for all the saints have stayed themselves upon it and it never failed them. (2.) The promise of Christ in particular; for to him this is expressly applied in the New Testament, 1 Pet. ii. 6—8. He is that stone which has become *the head of the corner.* The great promise of the Messiah and his kingdom, which was to begin at Jerusalem, was sufficient to make God's people easy in the worst of times; for they knew well that till he came *the sceptre should not depart from Judah.* Zion shall continue while this foundation is yet to be laid there. "*Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, for the comfort of those that dare not make lies their refuge, Behold, and look upon me as one that has undertaken to lay in Zion a Stone.*" Jesus Christ is a foundation of God's laying. *This is the Lord's doing.* He is laid in Zion, in the church, in the holy hill. He is a *tried stone*, a *trying stone* (so some), a *touch-stone*, that shall distinguish between true and counterfeit. He is a precious stone, for such are the foundations of the New Jerusalem (Rev. xxi. 19), a *corner-stone*, in whom the sides of the building are united, the *head-stone of the corner.* And he that believes these promises, and rests upon them, *shall not make haste*, shall not run to and fro in a hurry, as men at their wits' end, shall not be shifting hither and thither for his own safety, nor be driven to his feet by any terrors, as the wicked man is said to be (Job xviii. 11), but with a fixed heart shall quietly wait the event, saying, *Welcome the will of God.* He *shall not make haste* in his expectations, so as to anticipate the time set in the divine counsels, but, though it tarry, will wait the appointed hour, knowing that *he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.* He that believes will not make more haste than good speed, but be satisfied that God's time is the best time, and wait with patience for it. The apostle from the LXX. explains this, 1 Pet. ii. 6. *He that believes on him shall not be confounded*; his expectations shall not be frustrated, but far out-doe.

2. He tells them that upon the grounds which they now built on they could not be safe, but their confidences would certainly fail them (v. 17): *Judgment will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet.* This denotes,



(1.) The building up of his church ; having laid the foundation (v. 16), he will raise the structure, as builders do, by line and plummet, Zech. iv. 10. Righteousness shall be the line and judgment the plummet. The church, being founded on Christ, shall be formed and reformed by the scripture, the standing rule of judgment and righteousness. *Judgment shall return unto righteousness*, Ps. xciv. 15. Or,

(2.) The punishing of the church's enemies, against whom he will proceed in strict justice, according to the threatenings of the law. He will give them their deserts, and bring upon them the judgments they have challenged, but in wisdom too, and by an exact rule, that the tares may not be plucked up with the wheat. And when God comes thus to execute judgment,

[1.] These scornful men will be made ashamed of the vain hopes with which they had deluded themselves. *First*, They designed to make lies their refuge ; but it will indeed prove a refuge of lies, which *the hail shall sweep away*, that tempest of hail spoken of v. 2. Those that make lies their refuge build upon the sand, and the building will fall when the storm comes, and bury the builder in the ruins of it. Those that make any thing their hiding place but Christ shall find that the waters will overflow it, as every shelter but the ark was over-topped and overthrown by the waters of the deluge. Such is the hope of the hypocrite ; this will come of all his confidences. *Secondly*, They boasted of a covenant with death, and an agreement with the grave ; but it shall be *disannulled*, as made without his consent who has the keys and sovereign command of hell and death. Those do but delude themselves that think by any wiles to evade the judgments of God. *Thirdly*, They fancied that when the overflowing scourge should pass through the land it should not come near them ; but the prophet tells them that then, when others were falling by the common calamity, they should not only share in it, but should be trodden down by it : "You shall be to it for a treading down ; it shall triumph over you as much as over any other, and you shall become its easy prey." They are further told (v. 19), 1. That it shall begin with them ; they shall be so far from escaping it that they shall be the first that shall fall by it : "*From the time it goes forth it shall take you*, as if it came on purpose to seize you." 2. That it shall pursue them closely : "*Morning by morning shall it pass over* ; as duly as the day returns you shall hear of some desolation or other made by it ; for divine justice will follow its blow ; you shall never be safe nor easy by day nor by night ; there shall be a pestilence walking in darkness and a destruction wasting at noon-day." 3. That there shall be no avoiding it : "The understanding of the report of its approach shall not give you any opportunity

to make your escape, for there shall be no way of escape open ; but it shall be only a vexation, you shall see it coming, and not see how to help yourselves." Or, "The very report of it at a distance will be a terror to you ; what then will the thing itself be ?" Evil tidings are a terror and vexation to scornors, but he whose heart is fixed, *trusting in God, is not afraid of them* ; whereas, when the *overflowing scourge* comes, then all the comforts and confidences of scornors fail them, v. 20. (1.) That in which they thought to repose themselves reaches not to the length of their expectations : *The bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself upon it*, so that he is forced to cramp and contract himself. (2.) That in which they thought to shelter themselves proves insufficient to answer the intention : *The covering is narrower than that a man can wrap himself in it*. Those that do not build upon Christ as their foundation, but rest in a righteousness of their own, will prove in the end thus to have deceived themselves ; they can never be easy, safe, nor warm ; the bed is too short, the covering is too narrow ; like our first parents' fig-leaves, the shame of their nakedness will still appear.

[2.] God will be glorified in the accomplishment of his counsels, v. 21. When God comes to contend with these scornors *First*, He will do his work, and bring to pass his act, he will work for his own honour and glory, according to his own purpose ; the work shall appear to all that see it to be the work of God as the righteous Judge of the earth. *Secondly*, He will do it now against his people, as formerly he did it against their enemies, by which his justice will appear to be impartial ; he will now *rise up against Jerusalem as*, in David's time, against the Philistines in Mount Perazim (2 Sam. v. 20), and as, in Joshua's time, against the Canaanites in the valley of Gibeon. If those that profess themselves members of God's church by their pride and scornfulness make themselves like Philistines and Canaanites, they must expect to be dealt with as such. *Thirdly*, This will be his *strange work*, his *strange act*, his foreign deed. It is work that he is backward to : he rather delights in showing mercy, and *does not afflict willingly*. It is work that he is not used to as to his own people ; he protects and favours them. It is a strange work indeed if he *turn to be their enemy and fight against them*, ch. lxiii. 10. It is a work that all the neighbours will stand amazed at (Deut. xxix. 24) ; and therefore the ruins of Jerusalem are said to be an *astonishment*, Jer. xxv. 18.

*Lastly*, We have the use and application of all this (v. 22) : "*Therefore be you not mockers* ; dare not to ridicule either the reproofs of God's word or the approaches of his judgments." *Mocking the messengers of the Lord* was Jerusalem's measure-filling sin. The consideration of the judgments of

God that are coming upon hypocritical professors should effectually silence mockers, and make them serious: "*Be you not mockers, lest your bands be made strong*, both the bands by which you are bound under the dominion of sin" (for there is little hope of the conversion of mockers) "and the bands by which you are bound over to the judgments of God." God has bands of justice strong enough to hold those that break all the bonds of his law asunder and cast away all his cords from them. Let not these mockers make light of divine threatenings, for the prophet (who is one of those with whom the secret of the Lord is) assures them that the Lord God of hosts has, in his hearing, *determined a consumption upon the whole earth*; and can they think to escape? or shall their unbelief invalidate the threatening?

23 Give ye ear, and hear my voice; hearken, and hear my speech. 24 Doth the ploughman plough all day to sow? Doth he open and break the clods of his ground? 25 When he hath made plain the face thereof, doth he not cast abroad the fitches, and scatter the cummin, and cast in the principal wheat and the appointed barley and the rie in their place? 26 For his God doth instruct him to discretion, *and* doth teach him. 27 For the fitches are not threshed with a threshing-instrument, neither is a cart-wheel turned about upon the cummin; but the fitches are beaten out with a staff; and the cummin with a rod. 28 Bread-corn is bruised; because he will not ever be threshing it, nor break it *with* the wheel of his cart, nor bruise it *with* his horsemen. 29 This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, *which* is wonderful in counsel, *and* excellent in working.

This parable, which (like many of our Saviour's parables) is borrowed from the husbandman's calling, is ushered in with a solemn preface demanding attention, *He that has ears to hear, let him hear*, hear and understand, v. 23.

1. The parable here is plain enough, that the husbandman applies himself to the business of his calling with a great deal of pains and prudence, *secundum artem*—according to rule, and, as his judgment directs him, observes a method and order in his work. 1. In his ploughing and sowing: *Does the ploughman plough all day to sow?* Yes, he does, and he *ploughs in hope* and *sows in hope*, 1 Cor. ix. 10. *Does he open and break the clods?* Yes, he does, that the land may be fit to receive the seed. And *when he has thus*

*made plain the face thereof* does he not sow his seed, seed suitable to the soil? For the husbandman knows what grain is fit for clayey ground and what for sandy ground, and, accordingly, he sows each in its place—*wheat in the principal place* (so the margin reads it), for it is the principal grain, and was a staple commodity of Canaan (Ezek. xxvii. 17), and *barley in the appointed place*. The wisdom and goodness of the God of nature are to be observed in this, that, to oblige his creatures with a grateful variety of productions, he has suited to them an agreeable variety of earths. 2. In his threshing, v. 27, 28. This also he proportions to the grain that is to be threshed out. *The fitches and the cummin*, being easily got out of their husk or ear, are only threshed with a *staff and a rod*; but the *bread-corn* requires more force, and therefore that must be bruised with a *threshing instrument*, a sledge shod with iron, that was drawn to and fro over it, to beat out the corn; and yet *he will not be ever threshing it*, nor any longer than is necessary to loosen the corn from the chaff; *he will not break it*, or crush it, into the ground *with the wheel of his cart*, nor bruise it to pieces *with his horsemen*; the grinding of it is reserved for another operation. Observe, by the way, what pains are to be taken, not only for the earning, but for the preparing of our necessary food; and yet, after all, it is *meat that perishes*. Shall we then grudge to labour much more for the *meat which endures to everlasting life*? *Bread-corn is bruised*. Christ was so; *it pleased the Lord to bruise him*, that he might be the bread of life to us.

II. The interpretation of the parable is not so plain. Most interpreters make it a further answer to those who set the judgments of God at defiance: "Let them know that as the husbandman will not be always ploughing, but will at length sow his seed, so God will not be always threatening, but will at length execute his threatenings and bring upon sinners the judgments they have deserved; but in wisdom, and in proportion to their strength, not that they may be ruined, but that they may be reformed and brought to repentance by them." But I think we may give this parable a greater latitude in the exposition of it. 1. In general, that God who gives the husbandman this wisdom is, doubtless, himself infinitely wise. It is God that *instructs the husbandman to discretion*, as *his God*, v. 26. Husbandmen have need of discretion wherewith to order their affairs, and ought not to undertake that business unless they do in some measure understand it; and they should by observation and experience endeavour to improve themselves in the knowledge of it. Since *the king himself is served of the field*, the advancing of the art of husbandry is a common service to mankind more than the cultivating of most other arts. The skill of the husbandman is from God, as every good and perfect gift is.



This takes off somewhat of the weight and terror of the sentence passed on man for sin, that when God, in execution of it, sent man to till the ground, he taught him how to do it most to his advantage, otherwise, in the greatness of his folly, he might have been for ever *tilling the sand of the sea*, labouring to no purpose. It is he that gives men capacity for this business, an inclination to it, and a delight in it; and if some were not by Providence cut out for it, and made to rejoice (as Issachar, that tribe of husbandmen) in their tents, notwithstanding the toil and faigue of this business, we should soon want the supports of life. If some are more discreet and judicious in managing these or any other affairs than others are, God must be acknowledged in it; and to him husbandmen must seek for direction in their business, for they, above other men, have an immediate dependence upon the divine Providence. As to the other instance of the husbandman's conduct in threshing his corn, it is said, *This also comes forth from the Lord of hosts, v. 29.* Even the plainest dictate of sense and reason must be acknowledged to *come forth from the Lord of hosts*. And, if it is from him that men do things wisely and discreetly, we must needs acknowledge him to be *wise in counsel and excellent in working*. God's working is according to his will; he never acts against his own mind, as men often do, and there is a counsel in his whole will: he is *therefore* excellent in working, because he is wonderful in counsel. 2. God's church is his husbandry, 1 Cor. 3. 9. If Christ is the true vine, his Father is the husbandman (John xv. 1), and he is continually by his word and ordinances cultivating it. *Does the ploughman plough all day, and break the clods of his ground, that it may receive the seed, and does not God by his ministers break up the fallow ground? Does not the ploughman, when the ground is fitted for the seed, cast in the seed in its proper soil? He does so, and so the great God sows his word by the hand of his ministers* (Matt. xiii. 19), who are to divide the word of truth and give every one his portion. Whatever the soil of the heart is, there is some seed or other in the word proper for it. And, as the word of God, so the rod of God is thus wisely made use of. Afflictions are God's threshing-instruments, designed to loosen us from the world, to separate between us and our chaff, and to prepare us for use. And, as to these, God will make use of them as there is occasion; but he will proportion them to our strength; they shall be no heavier than there is need. If the rod and the staff will answer the end, he will not make use of his cart-wheel and his horsemen. And where these are necessary, as for the bruising of the bread-corn (which will not otherwise be got clean from the straw), yet he will not be ever threshing it, will not always chide, but his anger shall

endure but for a moment; nor will he *crush under his feet the prisoners of the earth*. And herein we must acknowledge him *wonderful in counsel and excellent in working*.

## CHAP. XXIX.

This woe to Ariel, which we have in this chapter, is the same with the "burden of the valley of vision" (ch. xiii. 1), and (it is very probable) points at the same event—the besieging of Jerusalem by the Assyrian army, which was cut off there by an angel; yet it is applicable to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, and its last desolations by the Romans. Here is, I. The event itself foretold, that Jerusalem should be greatly distressed (ver. 1–4. 6), but that their enemies, who distressed them, should be baffled and defeated, ver. 5, 7, 8. II. A reproof to three sorts of sinners:—I. Those that were stupid, and regardless of the warnings which the prophet gave them, ver. 9–12. 2. Those that were formal and hypocritical in their religious performances, ver. 13, 14. 3. Those politicians that atheistically and profanely despised God's providence, and set up their own projects in competition with it, ver. 15, 16. III. Precious promises of grace and mercy to a distinguished remnant whom God would sanctify, and in whom he would be sanctified, when their enemies and persecutors should be cut off, ver. 17–24.

**W**OE to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt! Add ye year to year; let them kill sacrifices. 2 Yet I will distress Ariel, and there shall be heaviness and sorrow: and it shall be unto me as Ariel. 3 And I will camp against thee round about, and will lay siege against thee with a mount, and I will raise forts against thee. 4 And thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be, as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust. 5 Moreover the multitude of thy strangers shall be like small dust, and the multitude of the terrible ones shall be as chaff that passeth away: yea, it shall be at an instant suddenly. 6 Thou shalt be visited of the LORD of hosts with thunder, and with earthquake, and great noise, with storm and tempest, and the flame of devouring fire. 7 And the multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel, even all that fight against her and her munition, and that distress her, shall be as a dream of a night-vision. 8 It shall even be as when a hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and, behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite: so shall the multitude of all the nations be, that fight against mount Zion.

That it is Jerusalem which is here called Ariel is agreed, for that was the city where

David dwelt; that part of it which was called Zion was in a particular manner the city of David, in which both the temple and the palace were. But why it is so called is very uncertain: probably the name and the reason were then well known. Cities, as well as persons, get surnames and nicknames. *Ariel* signifies the *lion of God*, or the *strong lion*: as the lion is king among beasts, so was Jerusalem among the cities, giving law to all about her; it was the *city of the great King* (Ps. xlviii. 1, 2); it was the head-city of Judah, who is called a *lion's whelp* (Gen. xlix. 9) and whose ensign was a lion; and he that is the lion of the tribe of Judah was the glory of it. Jerusalem was a terror sometimes to the neighbouring nations, and, while she was a righteous city, was bold as a lion. Some make *Ariel* to signify the *altar of burnt-offerings*, which devoured the beasts offered in sacrifice as the lion does his prey. Woe to that altar in the city where David dwelt; that was destroyed with the temple by the Chaldeans. I rather take it as a woe to Jerusalem, Jerusalem; it is repeated here, as it is Matt. xxiii. 37, that it might be the more awakening. Here is,

I. The distress of Jerusalem foretold. Though Jerusalem be a strong city, as a lion, though a holy city, as a lion of God, yet, if iniquity be found there, woe be to it. It was the *city where David dwelt*; it was he that brought that to it which was its glory, and which made it a type of the gospel church, and his dwelling in it was typical of Christ's residence in his church. This is mentioned as an aggravation of Jerusalem's sin, that in it were set both the testimony of Israel and the *thrones of the house of David*. 1. Let Jerusalem know that her external performance of religious services will not serve as an exemption from the judgments of God (v. 1): "*Add year to year; go on in the road of your annual feasts, let all your males appear there three times a year before the Lord, and none empty, according to the law and custom, and let them never miss any of these solemnities: let them kill the sacrifices, as they used to do; but, as long as their lives are unreformed and their hearts unhumiliated, let them not think thus to pacify an offended God and to turn away his wrath.*" Note, Hypocrites may be found in a constant track of devout exercises, and treading around in them, and with these they may flatter themselves, but can never please God nor make their peace with him. 2. Let her know that God is coming forth against her in displeasure, that she shall be *visited of the Lord of hosts* (v. 6); her sins shall be enquired into and punished: God will reckon for them with terrible judgments, with the frightful alarms and rueful desolations of war, which shall be like *thunder and earthquakes, storms and tempests, and devouring fire*, especially upon the account of the *great noise*. When a foreign enemy was not

in the borders, but in the bowels of their country, roaring and ravaging, and laying all waste (especially such an army as that of the Assyrians, whose commanders being so very insolent, as appears by the conduct of Rabshakeh, the common soldiers, no doubt, were much more rude), they might see the Lord of those hosts visiting them with thunder and storm. Yet, this being here said to be a *great noise*, perhaps it is intimated that they shall be worse frightened than hurt. Particularly, (1.) Jerusalem shall be besieged, straitly besieged. He does not say, *I will destroy Ariel*, but *I will distress Ariel*; and she is *therefore* brought into distress, that, being thereby awakened to repent and reform, she may not be brought to destruction. *I will (v. 3) encamp against thee round about*. It was the enemy's army that encamped against it; but God says that he will do it, for they are his hand, he does it by them. God had often and long, by a host of angels, encamped for them round about them for their protection and deliverance; but now he was *turned to be their enemy* and fought against them. The siege laid against them was of his laying, and the forts raised against them were of his raising. Note, When men fight against us we must, in them, see God contending with us. (2.) She shall be in grief to see the country laid waste and all the fenced cities of Judah in the enemies' hand. *There shall be heaviness and sorrow* (v. 2), *mourning and lamentation*—so these two words are sometimes rendered. Those that are most merry and jovial are commonly, when they come to be in distress, most overwhelmed with heaviness and sorrow; their laughter is then turned into mourning. "*All Jerusalem shall then be unto me as Ariel*, as the altar, with fire upon it and slain victims about it: so it was when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Chaldeans; and many, no doubt, were slain when it was besieged by the Assyrians. "*The whole city shall be an altar, in which sinners, falling by the judgments that are abroad, shall be as victims to divine justice.*" Or thus:—"*There shall be heaviness and sorrow*; they shall repent, and reform, and return to God, and then it shall be to me as Ariel. Jerusalem shall be like itself, shall become to me a Jerusalem again, a holy city," ch. i. 26. (3.) She shall be humbled, and mortified, and made submissive (v. 4): "*Thou shalt be brought down from the height of arrogancy and insolence to which thou hast arrived: the proud looks and the proud language shall be brought down by one humbling providence after another.*" Those that despise God's judgments shall be humbled by them; for the proudest sinners shall either bend or break before him. They had talked big, had *lifted up the horn on high*, and had *spoken with a stiff neck* (Ps. lxxv. 5); but now thou shalt *speak out of the ground, out of the dust, as one that has a familiar spirit, whispering out*



*of the dust.* This intimates, [1.] That they should be faint and feeble, not able to speak up, nor to say all they would say; but as those who are sick, or whose spirits are ready to fail, their speech shall be low and interrupted. [2.] That they should be fearful, and in consternation, forced to speak low as being afraid lest their enemies should overhear them and take advantage against them. [3.] That they should be tame, and obliged to submit to the conquerors. When Hezekiah submitted to the king of Assyria, saying, *I have offended, that which thou puttest on me I will bear* (2 Kings xviii. 14), then his speech was low, out of the dust. God can make those to crouch that have been most daring, and quite dispirit them.

II. The destruction of Jerusalem's enemies is foretold, for the comfort of all that were her friends and well-wishers in this distress (v. 5, 7): "*Thou shalt be brought down* (v. 4), *to speak out of the dust*; so low thou shalt be reduced. *But*" (so it may be rendered) "*the multitude of thy strangers and thy terrible ones, the numerous armies of the enemy, shall themselves be like small dust, not able to speak at all, or so much as whisper, but as chaff that passes away.* Thou shalt be abased, but they shall be quite dispersed, smitten and slain after another manner (ch. xxvii. 7); they shall pass away, *yea it shall be in an instant, suddenly*: the enemy shall be surprised with the destruction, and you with the salvation." The army of the Assyrians was by an angel laid dead upon the spot, in an instant, suddenly. Such will be the destruction of the enemies of the gospel Jerusalem. *In one hour shall their judgment come*, Rev. xviii. 10. Again (v. 6), "*Thou shalt be visited, or (as it used to be rendered) She shall be visited with thunder and a great noise.* Thou shalt be put into a fright which thou shalt soon recover. But (v. 7) *the multitude of the nations that fight against her shall be as a dream of a night-vision*: they and their prosperity and success shall soon vanish past recal." *The multitude of the nations that fight against Zion shall be as a hungry man who dreams that he eats*, but still is hungry; that is, 1. Whereas they hoped to make a prey of Jerusalem, and to enrich themselves with the plunder of that opulent city, their hopes shall prove vain dreams, with which their fancies may please and sport themselves for a while, but they shall be disappointed. They fancied themselves masters of Jerusalem, but shall never be so. 2. They themselves, and all their pomp, and power, and prosperity, shall vanish like a dream when one awakes, shall be of as little value and as short continuance, Ps. lxxiii. 20. He shall *fly away as a dream*, Job xx. 8. The army of Sennacherib vanished and was gone quickly, though it had filled the country as a dream fills a man's head, especially as a dream of meat fills the head of

him that went to bed hungry. Many understand these verses as part of the threatening of wrath, when God comes to distress Jerusalem, and lay siege to her. (1.) The multitude of her friends, whom she relies upon for help shall do her no good; for, though they are terrible ones, they shall be like the small dust, and shall pass away. (2.) The multitude of her enemies shall never think they can do her mischief enough; but, when they have devoured her much, still they shall be but like a man who dreams he eats, hungry, and greedy to devour her more.

9 Stay yourselves, and wonder; cry ye out, and cry: they are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink. 10 For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered. 11 And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot, for it is sealed: 12 And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned. 13 Wherefore the LORD said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: 14 Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work amongst this people, *even* a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid. 15 Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the LORD, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us, and who knoweth us? 16 Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter's clay: for shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not? Or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, He had no understanding?

Here, I. The prophet stands amazed at

the stupidity of the greatest part of the Jewish nation. They had Levites, who taught *the good knowledge of the Lord* and had encouragement from Hezekiah in doing so, 2 Chron. xxx. 22. They had prophets, who brought them messages immediately from God, and signified to them what were the causes and what would be the effects of God's displeasure against them. Now, one would think, *surely this great nation*, that has all the advantages of divine revelation, is *a wise and understanding people*, Deut. iv. 6. But, alas! it was quite otherwise, v. 9. The prophet addresses himself to the sober thinking part of them, calling upon them to be affected with the general carelessness of their neighbours. It may be read, "They delay, they put off, their repentance, but wonder you that they should be so sottish. They sport themselves with their own deceivings; they riot and revel; but do you cry out, lament their folly, cry to God by prayer for them. The more insensible they are of the hand of God gone out against them the more do you lay to heart these things." Note, The security of sinners in their sinful ways is just matter of lamentation and wonder to all serious people, who should think themselves concerned to pray for those that do not pray for themselves. But what is the matter? What are we thus to wonder at? 1. We may well wonder that the generality of the people should be so sottish and brutish, and so infatuated, as if they were intoxicated: *They are drunken, but not with wine* (not with wine only, though with that they were often drunk), and they *erred through wine*, ch. xxviii. 7. They were drunk with the love of pleasures, with prejudices against religion, and with the corrupt principles they had imbibed. Like drunken men, they know not what they do or say, nor whither they go. They are not sensible of the divine rebukes they are under. *They have beaten me, and I felt it not*, says the drunkard, Prov. xxiii. 35. God speaks to them once, yea, twice; but, like men drunk, they perceive it not, they understand it not, but forget the law. *They stagger* in their counsels, are unstable and unsteady, and stumble at every thing that lies in their way. There is such a thing as spiritual drunkenness. 2. It is yet more strange that God himself should have *poured out upon them a spirit of deep sleep, and closed their eyes* (v. 10), that he who bids them awake and open their eyes should yet lay them to sleep and shut their eyes; but it is in a way of righteous judgment, to punish them for their *loving darkness rather than light*, their loving sleep. When God by his prophets called them they said, *Yet a little sleep, a little slumber*; and therefore he gave them up to strong delusions, and said, *Sleep on now*. This is applied to the unbelieving Jews, who rejected the gospel

of Christ, and were justly hardened in their infidelity, till wrath came upon them to the uttermost. Rom. xi. 8, *God has given them the spirit of slumber*. And we have reason to fear it is the woeful case of many who live in the midst of gospel light. 3. It is very sad that this should be the case with those who were their prophets, and rulers, and seers, that those who should have been their guides were themselves blindfolded; and it is easy to tell what the fatal consequences will be when the blind lead the blind. This was fulfilled when, in the latter days of the Jewish church, the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, were the great opposers of Christ and his gospel, and brought themselves under a judicial infatuation. 4. The sad effect of this was that all the means of conviction, knowledge, and grace, which they enjoyed, were ineffectual, and did not answer the end (v. 11, 12): "*The vision of all the prophets, true and false, has become to you as the words of a book, or letter, that is sealed up*; you cannot discern the truth of the real visions and the falsehood of the pretended ones." Or, every vision particularly that this prophet had seen for them, and published to them, had become unintelligible; they had it among them, but were never the wiser for it, any more than a man (though a good scholar) is for a book delivered to him sealed up, and which he must not open the seals of. He sees it is a book, and that is all; he knows nothing of what is in it. So they knew that what Isaiah said was a vision and prophecy, but the meaning of it was hidden from them; it was only a sound of words to them, which they were not at all alarmed by, nor affected with; it answered not the intention, for it made no impression at all upon them. Neither the learned nor the unlearned were the better for all the messages God sent them by his servants the prophets, nor desired to be so. The ordinary sort of people excused themselves from regarding what the prophets said with their want of learning and a liberal education, as if they were not concerned to know and do the will of God because they were not bred scholars: *It is nothing to me, I am not learned*. Those of better rank pretended that the prophet had a peculiar way of speaking, which was obscure to them, and which, though they were men of letters, they had not been used to; and, *Si non vis intelligi, debes negligi*—If you wish not to be understood, you deserve to be neglected. Both these are groundless pretences; for God's prophets have been no unfaithful debtors either to the wise or to the unwise, Rom. i. 14. Or we may take it thus:—The book of prophecy was given to them sealed, so that they could not read it, as a just judgment upon them; because it had often been delivered to them unsealed, and they



would not take pains to learn the language of it, and then made excuse for their not reading it because they were not learned. But observe, "The vision has become thus to you whose minds the god of this world has blinded; but it is not so in itself, it is not so to all; the same vision which to you is a *savour of death unto death* to others is and shall be a *savour of life unto life*." Knowledge is easy to him that understands.

II. The prophet, in God's name, threatens those that were formal and hypocritical in their exercises of devotion, v. 13, 14. Observe here,

1. The sin that is here charged upon them—dissembling with God in their religious performances, v. 13. He that knows the heart, and cannot be imposed upon with shows and pretences, charges it upon them, whether their hearts condemn them for it or no. He that is greater than the heart, and knows all things, knows that though they *draw nigh to him with their mouth*, and *honour him with their lips*, yet they are not sincere worshippers. To worship God is to make our approaches to him, and to present our adorations of him; it is to draw nigh to him as those that have business with him, with an intention therein to honour him. This we are to do with our mouth and with our lips, in speaking of him and in speaking to him; we must *render to him the calves of our lips*, Hosea xiv. 2. And, if the heart be full of his love and fear, out of the abundance of that the mouth will speak. But there are many whose religion is lip-labour only. They say that which expresses an approach to God and an adoration of him, but it is only from the teeth outward. For, (1.) They do not apply their minds to the service. When they pretend to be speaking to God they are thinking of a thousand impertinences: *They have removed their hearts far from me*, that they might not be employed in prayer, nor come within reach of the word. When work was to be done for God, which required the heart, that was sent out of the way on purpose, with the fool's eyes, into the ends of the earth. (2.) They do not make the word of God the rule of their worship, nor his will their reason: *Their fear towards me is taught by the precept of men*. They worshipped the God of Israel, not according to his appointment, but their own inventions, the directions of their false prophets or their idolatrous kings, or the usages of the nations that were round about them. The tradition of the elders was of more value and validity with them than the laws which God commanded Moses. Or, if they did worship God in a way conformable to his institution in the days of Hezekiah, a great reformer, they had more an eye to the precept of the king than to God's command. This our Saviour applies to the Jews in his time, who were formal in their

devotions and wedded to their own inventions, and pronounces concerning them that in vain they did worship God, Matt. xv. 8, 9.

2. It is a spiritual judgment with which God threatens to punish them for their spiritual wickedness (v. 14): *I will proceed to do a marvellous work*. They did one strange thing; they removed all sincerity from their hearts. Now God will go on and do another; he will remove all sagacity from their heads. *The wisdom of their wise men shall perish*. They played the hypocrite, and thought to put a cheat upon God, and now they are left to themselves to play the fool, and not only to put a cheat upon themselves, but to be easily cheated by all about them. Those that make religion more than a pretence, to serve a turn, are out in their politics; and it is just with God to deprive those of their understanding who part with their uprightness. This was fulfilled in the wretched infatuation which the Jewish nation were manifestly under, after they had rejected the gospel of Christ; they removed their hearts far from God, and therefore God justly removed wisdom far from them, and hid from their eyes the things that belonged even to their temporal peace. This is a marvellous work; it is surprising, it is astonishing, that wise men should of a sudden lose their wisdom and be given up to strong delusions. Judgments on the mind, though least taken notice of, are to be most wondered at.

III. He shows the folly of those that thought to act separately and secretly from God, and were carrying on designs independent upon God and which they projected to conceal from his all-seeing eye. Here we have, 1. Their politics described (v. 15): *They seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord*, that he may not know either what they do or what they design; they say, "Who sees us? No man, and therefore not God himself." The consultations they had about their own safety they kept to themselves, and never asked God's advice concerning them; nay, they knew they were displeasing to him, but thought they could conceal them from him; and, if he did not know them, he could not baffle and defeat them. See what foolish fruitless pains sinners take in their sinful ways; they seek deep, they sink deep, to hide their counsel from the Lord, who sits in heaven and laughs at them. Note, A practical disbelief of God's omniscience is at the bottom both of the carnal worships and of the carnal confidences of hypocrites; Ps. xciv. 7; Ezek. viii. 12; ix. 9. 2. The absurdity of their politics demonstrated (v. 16): *"Surely your turning of things upside down thus, your various projects, turning your affairs this and that way to make them shape as you would have them—or rather your inverting the order of things, and*

thinking to make God's providence give attendance to your projects, and that God must know no more than you think fit, which is perfectly turning things upside down and beginning at the wrong end—*shall be esteemed as the potter's clay.* God will turn and manage you, and all your counsels, with as much ease and as absolute a power as the potter forms and fashions his clay. See how God despises, and therefore what little reason we have to dread, those contrivances of men that are carried on without God, particularly those against him. (1.) Those that think to hide their counsels from God do in effect deny him to be their Creator. It is as if the work should say of him that made it, "He made me not; I made myself." If God made us, he certainly knows us, as the Psalmist shows (Ps. cxxxix. 1, 13—16); so that those who say that he does not see them might as well say that he did not make them. Much of the wickedness of the wicked arises from this, they forget that God formed them, Deut. xxxii. 18. Or, (2.) Which comes to the same thing, they deny him to be a wise Creator: *The thing framed saith of him that framed it, He had no understanding;* for if he had understanding to make us so curiously, especially to make us intelligent beings and to *put understanding into the inward part* (Job xxxviii. 36), no doubt he has understanding to know us and all we say and do. As those that quarrel with God, so those that think to conceal themselves from him, do in effect charge him with folly; but *he that formed the eye, shall he not see?* Ps. xciv. 9.

17 *Is it not yet a very little while,* and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be esteemed as a forest? 18 And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness. 19 The meek also shall increase *their* joy in the LORD, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. 20 For the terrible one is brought to nought, and the scorner is consumed, and all that watch for iniquity are cut off: 21 That make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate, and turn aside the just for a thing of nought. 22 Therefore thus saith the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob, Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale. 23 But when he seeth

his children, the work of mine hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify my name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel. 24 They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine.

Those that thought to hide their counsels from the Lord were said to turn things upside down (v. 16), and they intended to do it unknown to God; but God here tells them that he will turn things upside down his way; and let us see whose word shall stand, his or theirs. They disbelieve Providence: "Wait awhile," says God, "and you shall be convinced by ocular demonstration that there is a God who governs the world, and that he governs it and orders all the changes that are in it for the good of his church." The wonderful revolution here foretold may refer primarily to the happy settlement of the affairs of Judah and Jerusalem after the defeat of Sennacherib's attempt, and the repose which good people then enjoyed, when they were delivered from the alarms of the sword both of war and persecution. But it may look further, to the rejection of the Jews at the first planting of the gospel (for their hypocrisy and infidelity were here foretold, v. 13) and the admission of the Gentiles into the church.

I. In general, it is a great and surprising change that is here foretold, v. 17. *Lebanon*, that was a forest, *shall be turned into a fruitful field*; and Carmel, that was a fruitful field, shall become a forest. It is a counterchange. Note, Great changes, both for the better and for the worse, are often made in a very little while. It was a sign given them of the defeat of Sennacherib that the ground should be more than ordinarily fruitful (*ch. xxxvii. 30*): *You shall eat this year such as grows of itself*; food for man shall be (as food for beasts is) the spontaneous product of the soil. Then Lebanon became a fruitful field, so fruitful that that which used to be reckoned a fruitful field in comparison with it was looked upon but as a forest. When a great harvest of souls was gathered in to Christ from among the Gentiles then the wilderness was turned into a fruitful field; and the Jewish church, that had long been a fruitful field, became a desolate and deserted forest, *ch. liv. 1*.

II. In particular,

1. Those that were ignorant shall become intelligent, v. 18. Those that understood not this prophecy (but it was to them as a sealed book, v. 11) shall, when it is accomplished, understand it, and shall acknowledge, not only the hand of God in the event, but the voice of God in the prediction of it: *The deaf shall then hear the words of the book.* The fulfilling of prophecy is the best exposition of it. The poor Gentiles shall then have divine revelation brought among them; and those



that sat in darkness shall see a great light, those that were blind shall see out of obscurity; for the gospel was sent to them to *open their eyes*, Acts xxvi. 18. Observe, In order to the making of men fruitful in good affections and actions, the course God's grace takes with them is to open their understandings and make them hear the words of God's book.

2. Those that were erroneous shall become orthodox (v. 24): *Those that erred in spirit*, that were under mistakes and misapprehensions concerning the words of the book and the meaning of them, shall come to understanding, to a right understanding of things; the Spirit of truth shall rectify their mistakes and lead them into all truth. This should encourage us to pray for those that have erred and are deceived, that God can, and often does, bring such to understanding. Those that murmured at the truths of God as hard sayings, and loved to pick quarrels with them, shall learn the true meaning of these doctrines, and then they will be better reconciled to them. Those that erred concerning the providence of God as to public affairs, and murmured at the disposals of it, when they shall see the issue of things shall better understand them and be aware of what God was designing in all, Hos. xiv. 9.

3. Those that were melancholy shall become cheerful and pleasant (v. 19): *The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord*. Those who are poor in the world and poor in spirit, who, being in affliction, accommodate themselves to their affliction, are purely passive and not passionate, when they see God appearing for them, they shall *add, or repeat, joy in the Lord*. This intimates that even in their distress they kept up their joy in the Lord, but now they increased it. Note, Those who, when they are in trouble, can truly rejoice in God, shall soon have cause given them greatly to rejoice in him. When joy in the world is decreasing and fading joy in God is increasing and getting ground. This shining light shall shine more and more; for that which is aimed at is that *this joy may be full*. Even the *poor among men* may rejoice in the Holy One of Israel, and their poverty needs not deprive them of that joy, Hab. iii. 17, 18. And the meek, the humble, the patient, and dispassionate, shall grow in this joy. Note, The grace of meekness will contribute very much to the increase of our holy joy.

4. The enemies, that were formidable, shall become despicable. Sennacherib, that *terrible one*, and his great army, that put the country into such a consternation, shall be *brought to nought* (v. 20), shall be quite disabled to do any further mischief. The power of Satan, that terrible one indeed, shall be broken by the prevalency of Christ's gospel; and those that were subject to bondage through fear of him that had the

power of death shall be delivered, Heb. ii. 14, 15.

5. The persecutors, that were vexatious, shall be quieted, and so those they were troublesome to shall be quiet from the fear of them. To complete the repose of God's people, not only the terrible one from abroad shall be brought to nought, but the scornors at home too shall be consumed and cut off by Hezekiah's reformation. Those are a happy people, and likely to be so, who, when God gives them victory and success against their terrible enemies abroad, take care to suppress vice, and profaneness, and the spirit of persecution, those more dangerous enemies at home. Or, They shall be consumed and cut off by the judgments of God, shall be singled out to be made examples of. Or, They shall insensibly waste away, being put to confusion by the fulfilling of those predictions which they had made a jest of. Observe what had been the wickedness of these scornors, for which they should be cut off. They had been persecutors of God's people and prophets, probably of the prophet Isaiah particularly, and therefore he complains thus feelingly of them and of their subtle malice. Some as informers and persecutors, others as judges, did all they could to take away his life, or at least his liberty. And this is very applicable to the chief priests and Pharisees, who persecuted Christ and his apostles, and for that sin they and their nation of scornors were cut off and consumed. (1.) They ridiculed the prophets and the serious professors of religion; they despised them, and did their utmost to bring them into contempt; they were scornors, and sat in the seat of the scornful. (2.) They lay in wait for an occasion against them. By their spies they *watch for iniquity*, to see if they can lay hold of any thing that is said or done that may be called an iniquity. Or they themselves watch for an opportunity to do mischief, as Judas did to betray our Lord Jesus. (3.) They took advantage against them for the least slip of the tongue; and, if a thing were ever so little said amiss, it served them to ground an indictment upon. They *made a man*, though he were ever so wise and good a man, though he were a man of God, *an offender for a word*, a word mischosen or misplaced, when they could not but know that it was well meant. v. 21. They cavilled at every word that the prophets spoke to them by way of admonition, though ever so innocently spoken, and without any design to affront them. They put the worst construction upon what was said, and made it criminal by strained innuendoes. Those who consider how apt we all are to speak unadvisedly, and to mistake what we hear, will think it very unjust and unfair to *make a man an offender for a word*. (4.) They did all they could to bring those into trouble that dealt faithfully with them and told them of their faults. Those

that *reprove in the gates*, reprovers by office, that were bound by the duty of their place, as prophets, as judges, and magistrates, to show people their transgressions, they hated these, and laid snares for them, as the Pharisees' emissaries, who were sent to watch our Saviour that they might *entangle him in his talk* (Matt. xxii. 15), that they might have something to lay to his charge which might render him odious to the people or obnoxious to the government. *So persecuted they the prophets*; and it is next to impossible for the most cautious to place their words so warily as to escape such snares. See how base wicked people are, who bear ill-will to those who, out of good-will to them, seek to save their souls from death; and see what need reprovers have both of courage to do their duty and of prudence to avoid the snare. (5.) They pervert judgment, and will never let an honest man carry an honest cause: *They turn aside the just for a thing of nought*; they condemn him, or give the cause against him, upon no evidence, no colour or pretence whatsoever. They run a man down, and misrepresent him, by all the little arts and tricks they can devise, as they did our Saviour. We must not think it strange if we see the best of men thus treated; *the disciple is not greater than his Master*. But wait awhile, and God will not only *bring forth their righteousness*, but cut off and consume these scorners.

6. Jacob, who was made to blush by the reproaches, and made to tremble by the threatenings, of his enemies, shall now be relieved both against his shame and against his fear, by the rolling away of those reproaches and the defeating of those threatenings (v. 22): *Thus the Lord saith who redeemed Abraham*, that is, called him out of Ur of the Chaldees, and so rescued him from the idolatry of his fathers and plucked him as a *brand out of the fire*. He that redeemed Abraham out of his snares and troubles will redeem all that are by faith his genuine seed out of theirs. He that began his care of his church in the redemption of Abraham, when it and its Redeemer were in his loins, will not now cast off the care of it. Because the enemies of his people are so industrious both to blacken them and to frighten them, therefore he will appear for the house of Jacob, and they shall not be ashamed as they have been, but shall have wherewith to answer those that reproach them, nor shall *their faces now wax pale*; but they shall gather courage, and look their enemies in the face without change of countenance, as those have reason to do who have the God of Abraham on their side.

7. Jacob, who thought his family would be extinct and the entail of religion quite cut off, shall have the satisfaction of seeing a numerous progeny devoted to God for a generation, v. 23. (1.) He shall see his children, multitudes of believers and praying people,

the spiritual seed of faithful Abraham and wrestling Jacob. Having his quiver full of these arrows, he *shall not be ashamed* (v. 22), but shall speak with his enemy in the gate, Ps. cxvii. 5. Christ shall *not be ashamed* (ch. l. 7), *for he shall see his seed* (ch. liii. 10); he sees some, and foresees more, *in the midst of him*, flocking to the church, and residing there. (2.) His children are the work of God's hands; being formed by him, they are formed for him, *his workmanship, created unto good works*. It is some comfort to parents to think that their children are God's creatures, the work of the hands of his providence. But it will be much more a comfort to them to see their children his new creatures, the work of the hands of his grace. (3.) He and his children shall sanctify the name of God as their God, as the *Holy One of Jacob*, and shall fear and worship the God of Israel. This is opposed to his being ashamed and waxing pale; when he is delivered from his contempts and dangers he shall not magnify himself, but *sanctify the Holy One of Jacob*. If God make our condition easy, we must endeavour to make his name glorious. Parents and children are ornaments and comforts indeed to each other when they join in sanctifying the name of God. When parents give up their children, and children give up themselves, to God, to be *to him for a name and a praise*, then the forest will soon become a fruitful field.

## CHAP. XXX.

The prophecy of this chapter seems to relate (as that in the foregoing chapter) to the approaching danger of Jerusalem and desolations of Judah by Sennacherib's invasion. Here is, I. A just reproof to those who, in that distress, trusted to the Egyptians for help, and were all in a hurry to fetch succours from Egypt, ver. 1.—7. II. A terrible threatening against those who slighted the good advice which God by his prophets gave them for the repose of their minds in that distress, assuring them that whatever became of others the judgment would certainly overtake them, ver. 8.—17. III. A gracious promise to those who trusted in God, that they should not only see through the trouble, but should see happy days after it, times of joy and reformation, plenty of the means of grace, and therewith plenty of outward good things and increasing joys and triumphs (ver. 18.—25), and many of these promises are very applicable to gospel grace. IV. A prophecy of the total rout and ruin of the Assyrian army, which should be an occasion of great joy and an introduction to those happy times, ver. 27.—33.

**W**OE to the rebellious children, saith the LORD, that take counsel, but not of me; and that cover with a covering, but not of my Spirit, that they may add sin to sin: 2 That walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt! 3 Therefore shall the strength of Pharaoh be your shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt your confusion. 4 For his princes were at Zoan, and his ambassadors came to Hanes. 5 They were all ashamed of a people, *that could*



not profit them, nor be a help nor profit, but a shame, and also a reproach. 6 The burden of the beasts of the south: into the land of trouble and anguish, from whence *come* the young and old lion, the viper and fiery flying serpent, they will carry their riches upon the shoulders of young asses, and their treasures upon the bunches of camels, to a people *that shall not profit them*. 7 For the Egyptians shall help in vain, and to no purpose: therefore have I cried concerning this, Their strength is to sit still.

It was often the fault and folly of the people of the Jews that, when they were insulted by their neighbours on one side, they sought for succour from their neighbours on the other side, instead of looking up to God and putting their confidence in him. Against the Israelites they sought to the Syrians, 2 Chron. xvi. 2, 3. Against the Syrians they sought to the Assyrians, 2 Kings xvi. 7. Against the Assyrians they here sought to the Egyptians, and Rabshakeh upbraided them with so doing, 2 Kings xviii. 21. Now observe here,

I. How this sin of theirs is described, and what there was in it that was provoking to God. When they saw themselves in danger and distress, 1. They would not consult God. They would do things of their own heads, and not advise with God, though they had a ready and certain way of doing it by Urim or prophets. They were so confident of the prudence of their own measures that they thought it needless to consult the oracle; nay, they were not willing to put it to that issue: "*They take counsel among themselves, and one from another; but they do not ask counsel, much less will they take counsel, of me. They cover with a covering*" (they think to secure themselves with one shelter or other, which may serve to cover them from the violence of the storm), "*but not of my Spirit*" (not such as God by his Spirit, in the mouth of his prophets, directed them to), "and therefore it will prove too short a covering, and a refuge of lies." 2. They could not confide in God. They did not think it enough to have God on their side, nor were they at all solicitous to make him their friend, but they *strengthened themselves in the strength of Pharaoh*; they thought him a powerful ally, and doubted not but to be able to cope with the Assyrian while they had him for them. *The shadow of Egypt* (and it was but a shadow) was the covering in which they wrapped themselves.

II. What was the evil of this sin. 1. It

bespoke them *rebellious children*; and a *woe* is here denounced against them under that character, v. 1. They were, in profession, God's children; but, not trusting in him, they were justly stigmatized as rebellious; for, if we distrust God's providence, we do in effect withdraw ourselves from our allegiance. 2. They added sin to sin. It was sin that brought them into distress; and then, instead of repenting, they *trespassed yet more against the Lord*, 2 Chron. xxviii. 22. And those that had abused God's mercies to them, making them the fuel of their lusts, abused their afflictions too, making them an excuse for their distrust of God; and so they make bad worse, and add sin to sin; and those that do so, as they make their own chain heavy, so it is just with God to make their plagues wonderful. Now that which aggravated their sin was, (1.) That they took so much pains to secure the Egyptians for their allies: *They walk to go down to Egypt*, travel up and down to find an advantageous road thither; but they *have not asked at my mouth*, never considered whether God would allow and approve of it or no. (2.) That they were at such a vast expense to do it, v. 6. They load *the beasts of the south* (horses fetched from Egypt, which lay south from Judea) with their riches, fancying, as it is common with people in a fright, that they were safer any where than where they were. Or they sent their riches thither as bribes to Pharaoh's courtiers, to engage them in their interests, or as pay for their army. God would have helped them *gratis*; but, if they will have help from the Egyptians, they must pay dearly for it, and they seem willing to do so. The riches that are so spent will turn to a bad account. They carried their effects to Egypt through a land (so it may be read) of trouble and anguish, that vast howling wilderness which lay between Canaan and Egypt, *whence come the lion and fiery serpent*, Deut. viii. 15. They would venture through that dangerous wilderness, to bring what they had to Egypt. Or it may be meant of Egypt itself, which had been to Israel a house of bondage and therefore a land of trouble and anguish, and which abounded in ravenous and venomous creatures. See what dangers men run into that forsake God, and what dangers they will run into in pursuance of their carnal confidences and their expectations from the creature.

III. What would be the consequence of it. 1. The Egyptians would receive their ambassadors, would address them very respectfully, and be willing to treat with them (v. 4): *His princes were at Zoan*, at Pharaoh's court there, and had their audience of the king, who encouraged them to depend upon his friendship and the succours he would send them. But, 2. They would not answer their expectation: *They could not*

*profit them, v. 5.* For God says, *They shall not profit them (v. 6),* and every creature is that to us (and no more) which he makes it to be. The forces they were to furnish them with could not be raised in time; or, when they were raised, they were not fit for service, and they would not venture any of their veteran troops in the expedition; or the march was so long that they could not come up when they had occasion for them; or the Egyptians would not be cordial to Israel, but would secretly incline to the Assyrians, upon some account or other: *The Egyptians shall help in vain, and to no purpose, v. 7.* They shall hinder and hurt, instead of helping. And therefore, 3. These people, that were now so fond of the Egyptians, would at length be ashamed of them, and of all their expectations from them and confidence in them (v. 3): "*The strength of Pharaoh, which was your pride, shall be your shame; all your neighbours will upbraid you, and you will upbraid yourselves, with your folly in trusting to it. And the shadow of Egypt, that land shadowing with wings (ch. xviii. 1), which was your confidence, shall be your confusion; it will not only disappoint you, and be the matter of your shame, but it will weaken all your other supports, and be an occasion of mischief to you.*" God afterwards threatens the ruin of Egypt for this very thing, because they had dealt treacherously with Israel and been a staff of a reed to them, Ezek. xxix. 6, 7. The princes and ambassadors of Israel, who were so forward to court an alliance with them, when they come among them shall see so much of their weakness, or rather of their baseness, that *they shall all be ashamed of a people that could not be a help or profit to them, but a shame and reproach, v. 5.* Those that trust in God, in his power, providence, and promise, are never made ashamed of their hope; but those that put confidence in any creature will sooner or later find it a reproach to them. God is true, and may be trusted, but every man a liar, and must be suspected. The Creator is a rock of ages, the creature a broken reed. We cannot expect too little from man nor too much from God.

IV. The use and application of all this (v. 7): "*Therefore have I cried concerning this matter, this project of theirs. I have published it, that all might take notice of it. I have pressed it as one in earnest. Their strength is to sit still, in a humble dependence upon God and his goodness and a quiet submission to his will, and not to wander about and put themselves to great trouble to seek help from this and the other creature.*" If we sit still in a day of distress, hoping and quietly waiting for the salvation of the Lord, and using only lawful regular methods for our own preservation, this will be the strength of our souls both for services and sufferings, and it will engage

divine strength for us. We weaken ourselves, and provoke God to withdraw from us, when we make flesh our arm, for then our hearts depart from the Lord. When we have tired ourselves by seeking for help from creatures we shall find it the best way of recruiting ourselves to repose in the Creator. *Here I am, let him do with me as he pleases.*

8 Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever: 9 That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the LORD: 10 Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits: 11 Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us. 12 Wherefore thus saith the Holy One of Israel, Because ye despise this word, and trust in oppression and perverseness, and stay thereon: 13 Therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant. 14 And he shall break it as the breaking of the potter's vessel that is broken in pieces; he shall not spare; so that there shall not be found in the bursting of it a sherd to take fire from the hearth, or to take water withal out of the pit. 15 For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not. 16 But ye said, No; for we will flee upon horses; therefore shall ye flee: and, We will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue you be swift. 17 One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one; at the rebuke of five shall ye flee: till ye be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain, and as an ensign on a hill.

Here, I. The preface is very awful. The prophet must not only preach this, but he must write it (v. 8), *write it in a table, to be hung up and exposed to public view; he must carefully note it, not in loose papers*



which might be lost or torn, but in a book, to be preserved for posterity, in *perpetuam rei memoriam*—for a standing testimony against this wicked generation; let it remain not only to the next succeeding ages, but for ever and ever, while the world stands; and so it shall, for the book of the scriptures, no doubt, shall continue, and be read, to the end of time. Let it be written,

1. To shame the men of the present age, who would not hear and heed it when it was spoken. Let it be written, that it may not be lost; their children may profit by it, though they will not. 2. To justify God in the judgments he was about to bring upon them; people will be tempted to think he was too hard upon them, and over-severe, unless they know how very bad they were, how very provoking, and what fair means God tried with them before he brought it to this extremity. 3. For warning to others not to do as they did, lest they should fare as they fared. It is designed for admonition to those of the remotest place and age, even those upon whom the ends of the world have come, 1 Cor. x. 11. It may be of use for God's ministers not only to preach, but to write; for that which is written remains.

II. The character given of the profane and wicked Jews is very sad. He must, if he will draw them in their own colours, write this concerning them (and we are sure he does not bear false witness against them, nor make them worse than they were, for the judgment of God is according to truth), *That this is a rebellious people, v. 9.* The Jews were, for aught we know, the only professing people God had then in the world, and yet many of them were a rebellious people. 1. They rebelled against their own convictions and covenants: "They are lying children, that will not stand to what they say, that promise fair, but perform nothing;" when he took them into covenant with himself he said of them, *Surely they are my people, children that will not lie (ch. lxiii. 8)*; but they proved otherwise. 2. They rebelled against the divine authority: "They are children that will not hear the law of the Lord, nor heed it, but will do as they have a mind, let God himself say what he will to the contrary."

III. The charge drawn up against them is very high and the sentence passed upon them very dreadful. Two things they here stand charged with, and their doom is read for both, a fearful doom:—

1. They forbade the prophets to speak to them in God's name, and to deal faithfully with them.

(1.) This their sin is described, v. 10, 11. They set themselves so violently against the prophets to hinder them from preaching, or at least from dealing plainly with them in their preaching, did so banter them and brow-beat them, that they did in effect say to the seers, See not. They had the light, but they

loved darkness rather. It was their privilege that they had seers among them, but they did what they could to put out their eyes—that they had prophets among them, but they did what they could to stop their mouths; for they tormented them in their wicked ways, Rev. xi. 10. Those that silence good ministers, and discountenance good preaching, are justly counted, and called, *rebels against God.* See what it was in the prophets' preaching with which they found themselves aggrieved. [1.] The prophets told them of their faults, and warned them of their misery and danger by reason of sin, and they could not bear that. They must speak to them smooth things, must flatter them in their sins, and say that they did well, and there was no harm, no peril, in the course of life they lived in. Let a thing be ever so right and true, if it be not smooth, they will not hear it. But if it be agreeable to the good opinion they have of themselves, and will confirm them in that, though it be ever so false and ever so great a cheat upon them, they will have it prophesied to them. Those deserve to be deceived that desire to be so. [2.] The prophets stopped them in their sinful pursuits, and stood in their way like the angel in Balaam's road, with the sword of God's wrath drawn in their hand; so that they could not proceed without terror. And this they took as a great insult. When they went on forwardly in the way of their hearts they said to the prophets, "Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the paths. What do you do in our way? Cannot you let us alone to do as we please?" Those have their hearts fully set in them to do evil that bid their faithful monitors to stand out of their way. *Forbear, why shouldst thou be smitten?* 2 Chron. xxv. 16. [3.] The prophets were continually telling them of the Holy One of Israel, what an enemy he is to sin and how severely he will reckon with sinners; and this they could not endure to hear of. Both the thing itself and the expression of it were too serious for them; and therefore, if the prophets will speak to them, they will make it their bargain that they shall not call God the Holy One of Israel; for God's holiness is that attribute which wicked people most of all dread. Let us no more be troubled with that state-preface (as Mr. White calls it) to your impertinent harangues. Those have reason to fear perishing in their sins that cannot bear to be frightened out of them.

(2.) Now what is the doom passed upon them for this? We have it, v. 12, 13. Observe, [1.] Who it is that gives judgment upon them: *Thus saith the Holy One of Israel.* That title of God which they particularly excepted against the prophet makes use of. Faithful ministers will not be driven from using such expressions as are proper to awaken sinners, though they be displeasing. We must tell men that God is

the *Holy One of Israel*, and so they shall find him, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear. [2.] What the ground of the judgment is: *Because they despise this word*—either, in general, every word that the prophets said to them, or this word in particular, which declares God to be the *Holy One of Israel*: “they despise this, and will neither make it their fear, to stand in awe of it, nor make it their hope, to put any confidence in it; but, rather than they will be beholden to the *Holy One of Israel*, they will trust in oppression and perverseness, in the wealth they have got and the interest they have made by fraud and violence, or in the sinful methods they have taken for their own security, in contradiction to God and his will. On these they lean, and therefore it is just that they should fall.” [3.] What the judgment is that is passed upon them: “*This iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall*. This confidence of yours will be like a house built upon the sand, which will fall in the storm and bury the builder in the ruins of it. Your contempt of that word of God which you might build upon will make every thing else you trust to like a wall that bulges out, which, if any weight be laid upon it, comes down, nay, which often sinks with its own weight.” The ruin they would hereby bring upon themselves should be, *First*, A surprising ruin: *The breaking shall come suddenly, at an instant*, when they do not expect it, which will make it the more frightful, and when they are not prepared or provided for it, which will make it the more fatal. *Secondly*, An utter ruin, universal and irreparable: “You and all your confidences shall be not only weak as the potter’s clay (*ch. xxix. 16*), but broken to pieces as the potter’s vessel. He that has the rod of iron shall break it (*Ps. ii. 9*) and he shall not spare, shall not have any regard to it, nor be in care to preserve or keep whole any part of it. But, when once it is broken so as to be unfit for use, let it be dashed, let it be crushed, all to pieces, so that there may not remain one *sherd* big enough to take up a little fire or water”—two things we have daily need of, and which poor people commonly fetch in a piece of a broken pitcher. They shall not only be as a *bowing wall* (*Ps. lxi. 3*), but as a broken mug or glass, which is good for nothing, nor can ever be made whole again.

2. They slighted the gracious directions God gave them, not only how to secure themselves and make themselves safe, but how to compose themselves and make themselves easy; they would take their own way, *v. 15—17*. Observe here,

(1.) The method God put them into for salvation and strength. The God that knew them, and knew what was proper for them, and desired their welfare, gave them this prescription; and it is recommended to us

all. [1.] Would we be saved from the evil of every calamity, guarded against the temptation of it and secured from the curse of it, which are the only evil things in it? It must be *in returning and rest*, in returning to God and reposing in him as our rest. Let us return from our evil ways, into which we have gone aside, and rest and settle in the way of God and duty, and that is the way to be saved. “Return from this project of going down to Egypt, and rest satisfied in the will of God, and then you may trust him with your safety. *In returning* (in the thorough reformation of your hearts and lives) *and in rest* (in an entire submission of your souls to God and a complacency in him) *you shall be saved*.” [2.] Would we be strengthened to do what is required of us and to bear what is laid upon us? It must be *in quietness and in confidence*; we must keep our spirits calm and sedate by a continual dependence upon God, and his power and goodness; we must retire into ourselves with a holy quietness, suppressing all turbulent and tumultuous passions, and keeping the peace in our own minds. And we must rely upon God with a holy confidence that he can do what he will and will do what is best for his people. And this will be our strength; it will inspire us with such a holy fortitude as will carry us with ease and courage through all the difficulties we may meet with.

(2.) The contempt they put upon this prescription; they would not take God’s counsel, though it was so much for their own good. And justly will those die of their disease that will not take God for their physician. We are certainly enemies to ourselves if we will not be subjects to him. They would not so much as try the method prescribed: “*But you said*, No (*v. 16*), we will not compose ourselves, for *we will flee upon horses* and *we will ride upon the swift*; we will hurry hither and thither to fetch in foreign aids.” They think themselves wiser than God, and that they know what is good for themselves better than he does. When Sennacherib took all the fenced cities of Judah, those rebellious children would not be persuaded to sit still and patiently to expect God’s appearing for them, as he did wonderfully at last; but they would shift for their own safety, and thereby they exposed themselves to so much the more danger.

(3.) The sentence passed upon them for this. Their sin shall be their punishment: “You will flee, and therefore *you shall flee*; you will be upon the full speed, and therefore so shall those be that pursue you.” The dogs are most apt to run barking after him that rides fast. The conquerors protected those that sat still, but pursued those that made their escape; and so that very project by which they hoped to save themselves was justly their ruin and the most guilty suffered most. It is foretold, *v. 17*, [1.] That they



should be easily cut off; they should be so dispirited with their own fears, increased by their flight, that one of the enemy should defeat a thousand of them, and five put an army to flight, which could never be *unless their Rock had sold them*, Deut. xxxii. 30. [2.] That they should be generally cut off, and only here and there one should escape alone in a solitary place, and be left for a spectacle too, *as a beacon upon the top of a mountain*, a warning to others to avoid the like sinful courses and carnal confidences.

18 And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD *is* a God of judgment: blessed *are* all they that wait for him.

19 For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem: thou shalt weep no more: he will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee.

20 And *though* the LORD give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers.

21 And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, *This is the way*, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.

22 Ye shall defile also the covering of thy graven images of silver, and the ornament of thy molten images of gold: thou shalt cast them away as a menstruous cloth; thou shalt say unto it, Get thee hence.

23 Then shall he give the rain of thy seed, that thou shalt sow the ground withal; and bread of the increase of the earth, and it shall be fat and plenteous: in that day shall thy cattle feed in large pastures.

24 The oxen likewise and the young asses that ear the ground shall eat clean provender, which hath been winnowed with the shovel and with the fan.

25 And there shall be upon every high mountain, and upon every high hill, rivers *and* streams of waters in the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall. 26 Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be seven-fold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the LORD bindeth

up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound.

The closing words of the foregoing paragraph (*You shall be left as a beacon upon a mountain*) some understand as a promise that a remnant of them should be reserved as monuments of mercy; and here the prophet tells them what good times should succeed these calamities. Or the first words in this paragraph may be read by way of antithesis, *Notwithstanding this, yet will the Lord wait that he may be gracious*. The prophet, having shown that those who made Egypt their confidence would be ashamed of it, here shows that those who sat still and made God alone their confidence would have the comfort of it. It is matter of comfort to the people of God, when the times are very bad, that *all will be well yet*, well with those that fear God, when we say to the wicked, *It shall be ill with you*.

I. God will be gracious to them and will have mercy on them. This is the foundation of all good. If we find favour with God, and he have mercy upon us, we shall have comfort according to the time that we have been afflicted.

1. The mercy in store for them is very affectingly expressed. (1.) "*He will wait to be gracious* (v. 18); he will wait till you return to him and seek his face, and then he will be ready to meet you with mercy. He will wait, that he may do it in the best and fittest time, when it will be most for his glory, when it will come to you with the most pleasing surprise. He will continually follow you with his favours, and not let slip any opportunity of being gracious to you."

(2.) "*He will stir up himself to deliver you, will be exalted, will be raised up out of his holy habitation* (Zech. ii. 13), that he may appear for you in more than ordinary instances of power and goodness; *and thus he will be exalted*, that is, he will glorify his own name. This is what he aims at in having mercy on his people."

(3.) *He will be very gracious* (v. 19), and this in answer to prayer, which makes his kindness doubly kind: "*He will be gracious to thee, at the voice of thy cry*, the cry of thy necessity, when that is most urgent—the cry of thy prayer, when that is most fervent. *When he shall hear it*, there needs no more; at the first word *he will answer thee*, and say, *Here I am*." Herein he is very gracious indeed. In particular, [1.] Those who were disturbed in the possession of their estates shall again enjoy them quietly. When the danger is over *the people shall dwell in Zion, at Jerusalem*, as they used to do; they shall dwell safely, free from the fear of evil. [2.] Those who were all in tears shall have cause to rejoice, and shall weep no more; and those who dwell in Zion, the holy city, will find enough there to wipe away tears from their eyes.

2. This is grounded upon two great truths:

(1.) That *the Lord is a God of judgment*; he is both wise and just in all the disposals of his providence, true to his word and tender of his people. If he correct his children, it is *with judgment* (Jer. x. 24), with moderation and discretion, considering their frame. We think we may safely refer ourselves to a man of judgment; and shall we not commit our way to a God of judgment? (2.) That therefore all those are blessed who *wait for him*, who not only wait on him with their prayers, but wait for him with their hopes, who will not take any indirect course to extricate themselves out of their straits, or anticipate their deliverance, but patiently expect God's appearances for them in his own way and time. Because God is infinitely wise, those are truly happy who refer their cause to him.

II. They shall not again know the want of the means of grace, v. 20, 21. Here, 1. It is supposed that they might be brought into straits and troubles after this deliverance was wrought for them. It was promised (v. 19), that they should *weep no more* and that God would be *gracious to them*; and yet here it is taken for granted that God may give them the *bread of adversity and the water of affliction*, prisoners' fare (1 Kings xxii. 27), coarse and sorry food, such as the poor use. When one trouble is over we know not how soon another may succeed; and we may have an interest in the favour of God, and such consolations as are sufficient to prohibit weeping, and yet may have bread of adversity given us to eat and water of affliction to drink. Let us therefore not judge of love or hatred by what is before us. 2. It is promised that their eyes should *see their teachers*, that is, that they should have faithful teachers among them, and should have hearts to regard them and not slight them as they had done; and then they might the better be reconciled to the bread of adversity and the water of affliction. It was a common saying among the old Puritans, *Brown bread and the gospel are good fare*. A famine of bread is not so great a judgment as a famine of the word of God, Amos viii. 11, 12. It seems that their teachers had been removed into corners (probably being forced to shift for their safety in the reign of Ahaz), but it shall be so no more. *Veritas non quarit angulos—Truth seeks no corners for concealment*. But the teachers of truth may sometimes be driven into corners for shelter; and it goes ill with the church when it is so, when the woman with her crown of twelve stars is forced to flee into the wilderness (Rev. xii. 6), when the prophets are *hidden by fifty in a cave*, 1 Kings xviii. 4. But God will find a time to call the teachers out of their corners again, and to replace them in their solemn assemblies, which shall *see their own teachers, the eyes of all the synagogue* being fastened on them, Luke iv. 20. And it will be the more pleasing be-

cause of the restraint they have been for some time under, as light out of darkness, as life from the dead. To all that love God and their own souls this return of faithful teachers out of their corners, especially with a promise that they *shall not be removed into corners any more*, is the most acceptable part of any deliverance, and has comfort enough in it to sweeten even the bread of adversity and the water of affliction. But this is not all: 3. It is promised that they shall have the benefit, not only of the public ministry, but of private and particular admonition and advice (v. 21): "*Thy ears shall hear a word behind thee*, calling after thee as a man calls after a traveller that he sees going out of his road." Observe, (1.) Whence this word shall come—from *behind thee*, from some one whom thou dost not see, but who sees thee. "Thy eyes see thy teachers; but this is a teacher out of sight, it is thy own conscience, which shall now by the grace of God be awakened to do its office." (2.) What the word shall be: "*This is the way, walk you in it*." When thou art doubting, conscience shall direct thee to the way of duty; when thou art dull and trifling, conscience shall quicken thee in that way." As God has not left himself without witness, so he has not left us without guides to show us our way. (3.) The seasonableness of this word: It shall come *when you turn to the right hand or to the left*. We are very apt to miss our way; there are turnings on both hands, and those so tracked and seemingly straight that they may easily be mistaken for the right way. There are right-hand and left-hand errors, extremes on each side virtue; the tempter is busy courting us into the by-paths. It is happy then if by the particular counsels of a faithful minister or friend, or the checks of conscience and the strivings of God's Spirit, we be set right and prevented from going wrong. (4.) The success of this word: "It shall not only be spoken, but thy ears shall hear it; whereas God has formerly *spoken once, yea, twice*, and thou *hast not perceived it* (Job xxxiii. 14), now thou shalt listen attentively to these secret whispers, and hear them with an obedient ear." If God gives us not only the word, but the hearing ear, not only the means of grace, but a heart to make a good use of those means, we have reason to say, He is very gracious to us, and reason to hope he has yet further mercy in store for us.

III. They shall be cured of their idolatry, shall fall out with their idols, and never be reconciled to them again, v. 22. The deliverance God shall work for them shall convince them that it is their interest, as well as duty, to serve him only; and they shall own that, as their trouble was brought upon them for their idolatries, so it was removed upon condition that they should not return to them. This is also the good effect of their seeing their teachers and hearing the word



behind them; by this it shall appear that they are the better for the means of grace they enjoy—they shall break off from their nest-beloved sin. Observe, 1. How foolishly mad they had formerly been upon their idols, in the day of their apostasy. Idolaters are said to be *mad upon their idols* (Jer. 1. 38), doatingly fond of them. They had *graven images of silver*, and *molten images of gold*, and, though gold needs no painting, they had coverings and ornaments on these; they spared no cost in doing honour to their idols. 2. How wisely mad (if I may so speak) they now were at their idols, what a holy indignation they conceived against them in the day of their repentance. They not only degraded their images, but defaced them, not only defaced them, but defiled them; they not only spoiled the shape of them, but in a pious fury threw away the gold and silver they were made of, though otherwise valuable and convertible to a good use. They could not find in their hearts to make any vessel of honour of them. The rich clothes wherewith their images were dressed up they cast away as a filthy cloth which rendered those that touched it *unclean until the evening*, Lev. xv. 23. Note, To all true penitents sin has become very odious; they loathe it, and loathe themselves because of it; they cast it away to the dunghill, the fittest place for it, nay, to the cross, for they crucify the flesh; their cry against it is, *Crucify it, crucify it*. They say unto it, *Abi hinc in malam rem—Get thee hence*. They are resolved never to harbour it any more. They put as far from as they can all the occasions of sin and temptations to it, though they are as a right eye or a right hand, and protest against it as Ephraim did (Hos. xiv. 8), *What have I to do any more with idols?* Probably this was fulfilled in many particular persons, who, by the deliverance of Jerusalem from Sennacherib's army, were convinced of the folly of their idolatry and forsook it. It was fulfilled in the body of the Jewish nation at their return from their captivity in Babylon, for they abhorred idols ever after; and it is accomplished daily in the conversion of souls, by the power of divine grace, from spiritual idolatry to the fear and love of God. Those that join themselves to the Lord must abandon every sin, and say unto it, *Get thee hence*.

IV. God will then give them plenty of all good things. When he gives them their teachers, and they give him their hearts, so that they begin to seek the kingdom of God and the righteousness thereof, *then all other things shall be added to them*, Matt. vi. 33. And when the people are brought to praise God *then shall the earth yield her increase, and with it God, even our own God, shall bless us*, Ps. lxxvii. 5, 6. So it follows here: "When you shall have abandoned your idols, *then shall God give the rain of your seed*," c.

23. When we return to God in a way of duty he will meet us with his favours. 1. God will give you rain of your seed, rain to water the seed you sow, just at the time that it calls for it, as much as it needs and no more. Observe, How man's industry and God's blessing concur to the good things we enjoy relating to the life that now is: *Thou shalt sow the ground*, that is thy part, and then *God will give the rain of thy seed*, that is his part. It is so in spiritual fruit; we must take pains with our hearts and then wait on God for his grace. 2. The increase of the earth shall be rich and good, and every thing the best of the kind; it shall be *fat and fat*, very fat and very good, *fat and plenteous* (so we read it), good and enough of it. Your land shall be Canaan indeed; it was remarkably so after the defeat of Sennacherib, by the special blessing of God, ch. xxxvii. 30. God would thus repair the losses they sustained by that devastation. 3. Not only the tillage, but the pasture-ground should be remarkably fruitful: *The cattle shall feed in large pastures*; those that are at grass shall have room enough, and the oxen and asses that are kept up for use, to ear the ground, which must be the better fed for their being worked, *shall eat clean provender*. The corn shall not be given them in the chaff as usual, to make it go the further, but they shall have good clean corn fit for man's use, being *winnowed with the fan*. The brute-creatures shall share in the abundance; it is fit they should, for they groan under the burden of the curse which man's sin has brought upon the earth. 4. Even the tops of the mountains, that used to be barren, shall be so well watered with the rain of heaven that there shall be *ricers and streams* there, and running down thence to the valleys (v. 25), and this *in the day of the great slaughter* that should be made by the angel in the camp of the Assyrians, *when the towers and batteries* they had erected for the carrying on of the siege of Jerusalem, the army being slain, *should fall of course*. It is probable that this was fulfilled in the letter of it, and that about the same time that that army was cut off there were extraordinary rains in mercy to the land.

V. The effect of all this should be extraordinary comfort and joy to the people of God, v. 26. Light shall increase; that is, knowledge shall increase (when the prophecies are accomplished they shall be fully understood) or rather triumph shall: the light of the joy that is sown for the righteous shall now come up with a great increase. *The light of the moon shall become as bright and as strong as that of the sun, and that of the sun shall increase proportionably and be as the light of seven days*; every one shall be much more cheerful and appear much more pleasant than usual. There shall be a high spring-tide of joy in Judah and Jerusalem, upon occasion of the ruin of the

Assyrian army, *when the Lord binds up the breach of his people*, not only saves them from being further wounded, but heals the wounds that have been given them by this invasion and makes up all their losses. The great distress they were reduced to, their despair of relief, and the suddenness of their deliverance, would much augment their joy. This is not unfitly applied by many to the light which the gospel brought into the world to those that sat in darkness, which as far exceeded the Old-Testament light as that of the sun does that of the moon, and which proclaims *healing to the broken-hearted, and the binding up of their wounds*.

27 Behold, the name of the LORD cometh from far, burning *with his anger*, and the burthen *thereof is heavy*: his lips are full of indignation, and his tongue as a devouring fire: 28 And his breath, as an overflowing stream, shall reach to the midst of the neck, to sift the nations with the sieve of vanity: and *there shall be a bridle in the jaws of the people, causing them to err*. 29 Ye shall have a song, as in the night *when a holy solemnity is kept*; and gladness of heart, as when one goeth with a pipe to come into the mountain of the LORD, to the mighty One of Israel. 30 And the LORD shall cause his glorious voice to be heard, and shall show the lighting down of his arm, with the indignation of *his anger*, and *with the flame of a devouring fire, with scattering, and tempest, and hailstones*. 31 For through the voice of the LORD shall the Assyrian be beaten down, *which smote with a rod*. 32 And *in every place where the grounded staff shall pass, which the LORD shall lay upon him, it shall be with tabrets and harps*: and in battles of shaking will he fight with it. 33 For Tophet is ordained of old; yea, for the king it is prepared; he hath made *it deep and large*: the pile thereof *is fire and much wood*; the breath of the LORD, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it.

This terrible prediction of the ruin of the Assyrian army, though it is a threatening to them, is part of the promise to the Israel of God, that God would not only punish the Assyrians for the mischief they had done to the Israel of God, but would dis-

able and deter them from doing the like again; and this prediction, which would now shortly be accomplished, would ratify and confirm the foregoing promises, which should be accomplished in the latter days. Here is,

I. God Almighty angry, and coming forth in anger against the Assyrians. He is here introduced in all the power and all the terror of his wrath, *v. 27. The name of Jehovah*, which the Assyrians disdain and set at a distance from them, as if they were out of its reach and it could do them no harm, *behold, it comes from far*. A messenger in the name of the Lord comes from as far off as heaven itself. He is a messenger of wrath, *burning with his anger*. God's lips are full of indignation at the blasphemy of Rabshakeh, who compared the God of Israel with the gods of the heathen; *his tongue is as a devouring fire*, for he can speak his proud enemies to ruin; his very breath comes with as much force as an overflowing stream, and with it he shall slay the wicked, *ch. xi. 4*. He does not stifle or smother his resentments, as men do theirs when they are either causeless or impotent; but he *shall cause his glorious voice to be heard* when he proclaims war with an enemy that sets him at defiance, *v. 30*. He shall display the indignation of his anger, anger in the highest degree; it shall be as the flame of a devouring fire, which carries and consumes all before it, with lightning or dissipation, and with tempest and hailstones, all which are the formidable phenomena of nature, and therefore expressive of the terror of the Almighty God of nature.

II. The execution done by this anger of the Lord. Men are often angry when they can only threaten and talk big; but when God causes his glorious voice to be heard that shall not be all: he will *show the lighting down of his arm too, v. 30*. The operations of his providence shall accomplish the menaces of his word. Those that *would not see the lifting up of his arm (ch. xxvi. 11)* shall feel the lighting down of it, and find, to their cost, that the burden thereof is heavy (*v. 27*), so heavy that they cannot bear it, nor bear up against it, but must unavoidably sink and be crushed under it. *Who knows the power of his anger* or imagines what an offended God can do? Five things are here prepared for the execution:—1. Here is an overflowing stream, that shall reach to the midst of the neck, shall quite overwhelm the whole body of the army, and Sennacherib only, the head of it, shall keep above water and escape this stroke, while yet he is reserved for another in the house of Nisroch his god. The Assyrian army had been to Judah as an overflowing stream, reaching even to the neck (*ch. viii. 7, 8*), and now the breath of God's wrath will be so to it. 2. Here is a sieve of vanity, with which God would sift those nations of which the



Assyrian army was composed, *v.* 28. The great God can sift nations, for they are all before him as the small dust of the balance; he will sift them, not to gather out of them any that should be preserved, but so as to shake them one against another, put them into great consternation, and shake them all away at last; for it is a sieve of vanity (which retains nothing) that they are shaken with, and they are found all chaff. 3. Here is a *bridle*, which God has in their jaws, to curb and restrain them from doing the mischief they would do, and to force and constrain them to serve his purposes against their own will, *ch.* x. 7. God particularly says of Sennacherib (*ch.* xxxvii. 29) that he will put a hook in his nose and a bridle in his lips. It is a *bridle causing them to err*, forcing them to such methods as will certainly be destructive to themselves and their interest and in which they will be infatuated. God with a word guides his people into the right way (*v.* 21), but with a bridle he turns his enemies headlong upon their own ruin. 4. Here is a *rod* and a *staff*, even the *voice of the Lord*, his word giving orders concerning it, with which *the Assyrian shall be beaten down*, *v.* 31. The Assyrian had been himself a rod in God's hand for the chastising of his people, and had smitten them, *ch.* x. 5. That was a transient rod; but against the Assyrian shall go forth a *grounded staff*, that shall give a steady blow, shall stick close to him and strike home, so as to leave an impression upon him. It is a staff with a foundation, founded upon the enemies' deserts and God's determinate counsel. It is a consumption determined (*ch.* x. 23), and therefore there is no escaping it, no getting out of the reach of it; it shall pass in every place where an Assyrian is found, and the Lord shall *lay it upon him*, and cause it to rest, *v.* 32. Such is the woeful case of those that persist in enmity to God: *the wrath of God abides on them*. 5. Here is *Tophet ordained and prepared* for them, *v.* 33. The valley of the son of Hinnom, adjoining to Jerusalem, was called *Tophet*. In that valley, it is supposed, many of the Assyrian regiments lay encamped, and were there slain by the destroying angel; or there the bodies of those that were so slain were burned. Hezekiah had *lately, and from yesterday* (so the word is) *ordained it*; that is, say some, he had cleared it of the images that were set up in it, to which they there burnt their children, and so prepared it to be a receptacle for the dead bodies of their enemies, *for the king of Assyria* (that is, for his army) *it is prepared*, and there is fuel enough ready to burn them all; and they shall be consumed as suddenly and effectually as if the fire were kept burning by a continual stream of brimstone, for such the breath of the Lord, his word and his wrath, will be to it. Now as the prophet, in the foregoing promises, slides insensibly into

the promises of gospel graces and comforts, so here, in the threatening of the ruin of Sennacherib's army, he points at the final and everlasting destruction of all impenitent sinners. Our Saviour calls the future misery of the damned *Gehenna*, in allusion to the valley of Hinnom, which gives some countenance to the applying of this to that misery, as also that in the Apocalypse it is so often called the *lake that burns with fire and brimstone*. This is said to be prepared of old for the devil and his angels, for the greatest of sinners, the proudest, and that think themselves not accountable to any for what they say and do; even for kings it is prepared. It is *deep and large*, sufficient to receive the world of the ungodly; the *pile thereof is fire and much wood*. God's wrath is the fire, and sinners make themselves fuel to it; and *the breath of the Lord* (the power of his anger) *kindles it*, and will keep it ever burning. See *ch.* lxvi. 24. Wherefore *stand in awe and sin not*.

III. The great joy which this should occasion to the people of God. The Assyrian's fall is Jerusalem's triumph (*v.* 29). *You shall have a song as in the night*, a psalm of praise such as those sing who *by night stand in the house of the Lord*, and sing to his glory who *gives songs in the night*. It shall not be a song of vain mirth, but a sacred song, such as was sung when a holy solemnity was kept in a grave and religious manner. Our joy in the fall of the church's enemies must be a holy joy, *gladness of heart, as when one goes, with a pipe* (such as the sons of the prophets used when they prophesied, 1 Sam. x. 5), *to the mountain of the Lord*, there to celebrate the praises of *the Mighty One of Israel*. Nay, in every place where the divine vengeance shall pursue the Assyrians they shall not only fall unlamented, but all their neighbours shall attend their fall *with tabrets and harps*, pleased to see how God, *in battles of shaking*, such as shake them out of the world, fights with them (*v.* 32); for *when the wicked perish there is shouting*; and it is with a particular satisfaction that wise and good men see the ruin of those who, like the Assyrians, have insolently bidden defiance to God and trampled upon all mankind.

## CHAP. XXXI.

This chapter is an abridgment of the foregoing chapter; the heads of it are much the same. Here is, I. A woe to those who, when the Assyrian army invaded them, trusted to the Egyptians, and not to God, for succour, *ver.* 1-3. II. Assurance given of the care God would take of Jerusalem in that time of danger and distress, *ver.* 4, 5. III. A call to repentance and reformation, *ver.* 6, 7. IV. A prediction of the fall of the Assyrian army, and the fright which the Assyrian king should thereby be put into, *ver.* 8, 9.

**W**OE to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because *they are many*; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of

Israel, neither seek the LORD! 2 Yet he also *is* wise, and will bring evil, and will not call back his words: but will arise against the house of the evil doers, and against the help of them that work iniquity. 3 Now the Egyptians *are* men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit. When the LORD shall stretch out his hand, both he that helpeth shall fall, and he that is holpen shall fall down, and they all shall fail together. 4 For thus hath the LORD spoken unto me, Like as the lion and the young lion roaring on his prey, when a multitude of shepherds is called forth against him, *he* will not be afraid of their voice, nor abase himself for the noise of them: so shall the LORD of hosts come down to fight for mount Zion, and for the hill thereof. 5 As birds flying, so will the LORD of hosts defend Jerusalem; defending also he will deliver *it*; and passing over he will preserve *it*.

This is the last of four chapters together that begin with woe; and they are all woes to the sinners that were found among the professing people of God, to the *drunkards of Ephraim* (ch. xxviii. 1), to *Ariel* (ch. xxix. 1), to the *rebellious children* (ch. xxx. 1), and here to *those that go down to Egypt for help*; for men's relation to the church will not secure them from divine woes if they live in contempt of divine laws. Observe,

I. What the sin was that is here reproved, v. 1. 1. Idolizing the Egyptians, and making court to them, as if happy were the people that had the Egyptians for their friends and allies. They *go down to Egypt for help* in every exigence, as if the worshippers of false gods had a better interest in heaven and were more likely to have success on earth than the servants of the living and true God. That which invited them to Egypt was that the Egyptians had many chariots to accommodate them with, and horses and horsemen that were strong; and, if they could get a good body of forces thence into their service, they would think themselves able to deal with the king of Assyria and his numerous army. Their kings were forbidden to multiply horses and chariots, and were told of the folly of trusting to them (Ps. xx. 7); but they think themselves wiser than their Bible. 2. Slighting the God of Israel: *They look not to the Holy One of Israel*, as if he were not worth taking notice of in this distress. They advise not with him, seek not his favour, nor are in any care to make him their friend.

II. The gross absurdity and folly of this sin. 1. They neglected one whom, if they would not hope in him, they had reason to fear. They do not seek the Lord, nor make their application to him, *yet he also is wise*, v. 2. They are solicitous to get the Egyptians into an alliance with them, because they have the reputation of a politic people; and is not God wise too? and would not infinite wisdom, engaged on their side, stand them in more stead than all the policies of Egypt? They are at the pains of going down to Egypt, a tedious journey, when they might have had better advice, and better help, by looking up to heaven, and would not. But, if they will not court God's wisdom to act for them, they shall find it act against them. He is wise, too wise for them to outwit, and he will bring evil upon those who thus affront him. He will not call back his words as men do (because they are fickle and foolish), but he *will arise against the house of the evil-doers*, this cabal of them that go down to Egypt; God will appear to their confusion, according to the word that he has spoken, and will oppose the help they think to bring in from the workers of iniquity. Some think the Egyptians made it one condition of their coming into an alliance with them that they should worship the gods of Egypt, and they consented to it, and therefore they are both called *evil-doers* and *workers of iniquity*. 2. They trusted to those who were unable to help them and would soon appear to be so, v. 3. Let them know that the *Egyptians*, whom they depend so much upon, *are men and not God*. As it is good for men to know themselves to be but men (Ps. ix. 20), so it is good for us to consider that those we love and trust to are but men. They therefore can do nothing without God, nothing against him, nothing in comparison with him. They are men, and therefore fickle and foolish, mutable and mortal, here to day and gone to morrow; they are men, and therefore let us not make gods of them, by making them our hope and confidence, and expecting that in them which is to be found in God only; they are not God, they cannot do that for us which God can do, and will, if we trust in him. Let us not then neglect him, to seek to them; let us not forsake the rock of ages for broken reeds, nor the fountain of living waters for broken cisterns. The Egyptians indeed have horses that are very strong; but *they are flesh, and not spirit*, and therefore, strong as they are, they may be wearied with a long march, and become unserviceable, or be wounded and slain in battle, and leave their riders to be ridden over. Every one knows this, that the Egyptians are not God and their horses are not spirit; but those that seek to them for help do not consider it, else they would not put such confidence in them. Sinners may be convicted of folly by the plainest and most self-evident truths,



which they cannot deny, but will not believe. 3. They would certainly be ruined with the Egyptians they trusted in, *v. 3. When the Lord does but stretch out his hand* how easily, how effectually, will he make them ashamed of their confidence in Egypt, and the Egyptians ashamed of the encouragement they gave them to trust in them; *for he that helps and he that is helped shall fall together*, and their mutual alliance shall prove their joint ruin. The Egyptians were shortly to be reckoned with, as appears by the *burden of Egypt* (*ch. xix*), and then those who fled to them for shelter and succour should fall with them; for there is no escaping the judgments of God. *Evil pursues sinners*, and it is just with God to make that creature a scourge to us which we make an idol of. 4. They took God's work out of his hands. They pretended a great deal of care to preserve Jerusalem, in advising to an alliance with Egypt; and, when others would not fall in with their measures, they pleaded self-preservation, and went to Egypt themselves. Now the prophet here tells them that Jerusalem should be preserved without aid from Egypt and that those who tarried there should be safe when those who fled to Egypt should be ruined. Jerusalem was under God's protection, and therefore there was no occasion to put it under the protection of Egypt. But a practical distrust of God's all-sufficiency is at the bottom of all our sinful departures from him to the creature. The prophet tells them he had it from God's own mouth: *Thus hath the Lord spoken to me. They might depend upon it, (1.) That God would appear against Jerusalem's enemies with the boldness of a lion over his prey, v. 4. When the lion comes out to seize his prey a multitude of shepherds come out against him; for it becomes neighbours to help one another when persons or goods are in danger. These shepherds dare not come near the lion; all they can do is to make a noise, and with that they think to frighten him off. But does he regard it? No: he will not be afraid of their voice, nor abase himself so far as to be in the least moved by it either to quit his prey or to make any more haste than otherwise he would do in seizing it. Thus will the Lord of hosts come down to fight for Mount Zion, with such an unshaken undaunted resolution not to be moved by any opposition; and he will as easily and irresistibly destroy the Assyrian army as a lion tears a lamb in pieces. Whoever appear against God, they are but like a multitude of poor simple shepherds shouting at a lion, who scorns to take notice of them or so much as to alter his pace for them. Surely those that have such a protector need not go to Egypt for help. (2.) That God would appear for Jerusalem's friends with the tenderness of a bird over her young, v. 5. God was ready to gather Jerusalem, as a hen gathers her brood under her*

*wings* (*Matt. xxiii. 37*); but those that trusted to the Egyptians would not be gathered. *As birds flying* to their nests with all possible speed, when they see them attacked, and fluttering about their nests with all possible concern, hovering over their young ones to protect them and drive away the assailants, with such compassion and affection *will the Lord of hosts defend Jerusalem*. As an eagle stirs up her young when they are in danger, *takes them and bears them on her wings*, so the Lord led Israel out of Egypt (*Dent. xxxii. 11, 12*); and he has now the same tender concern for them that he had then, so that they need not flee into Egypt again for shelter. *Defending, he will deliver it; he will so defend it as to secure the continuance of its safety, not defend it for a while and abandon it at last, but defend it so that it shall not fall into the enemies' hand. I will defend this city to save it, ch. xxxvii. 35. Passing over he will preserve it; the word for passing over is used in this sense only here and Exod. xii. 12, 23, 27, concerning the destroying angel's passing over the houses of the Israelites when he slew all the first-born of the Egyptians, to which story this passage refers. The Assyrian army was to be routed by a destroying angel, who should pass over Jerusalem, though that deserved to be destroyed, and draw his sword only against the besiegers. They shall be slain by the pestilence, but none of the besieged shall take the infection. Thus he will again pass over the houses of his people and secure them.*

6 Turn ye unto *him from whom* the children of Israel have deeply revolted. 7 For in that day every man shall cast away his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which your own hands have made unto you *for a sin*. 8 Then shall the Assyrian fall with the sword, not of a mighty man; and the sword, not of a mean man, shall devour him: but he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall be discomfited. 9 And he shall pass over to his strong hold for fear, and his princes shall be afraid of the ensign, saith the LORD, whose fire is in Zion, and his furnace in Jerusalem.

This explains the foregoing promise of the deliverance of Jerusalem; she shall be fitted for deliverance, and then it shall be wrought for her; for in that method God delivers.

1. Jerusalem shall be reformed, and so she shall be delivered from her enemies within her walls, *v. 6, 7. Here is, 1. A gracious call to repentance. This was the Lord's voice crying in the city, the voice of*

the rod, the voice of the sword, and the voice of the prophets interpreting the judgment: "*Turn you, O turn you now, from your evil ways, unto God, return to your allegiance to him from whom the children of Israel have deeply revolted, from whom you, O children of Israel! have revolted.*" He reminds them of their birth and parentage, that they were *children of Israel*, and therefore under the highest obligations imaginable to the God of Israel, as an aggravation of their revolt from him and as an encouragement to them to return to him. "They have been backsliding children, yet children; therefore let them return, and their backslidings shall be healed. They have deeply revolted, with great address as they supposed (*the revolters are profound*, Hos. v. 2); but the issue will prove that they have revolted dangerously. The stain of their sins has gone deeply into their nature, not to be easily got out, like the blackness of the Ethiopian. *They have deeply corrupted themselves* (Hos. ix. 9); they have sunk deep into misery, and cannot easily recover themselves; therefore you have need to hasten your return to God." 2. A gracious promise of the good success of this call (v. 7): *In that day every man shall cast away his idols*, in obedience to Hezekiah's orders, which, till they were alarmed by the Assyrian invasion, many refused to do. That is a happy fright which frightens us from our sins. (1.) It shall be a general reformation: every man shall cast away his own idols, shall begin with them before he undertakes to demolish other people's idols, which there will be no need of when every man reforms himself. (2.) It shall be a thorough reformation; for they shall part with their idolatry, their beloved sin, with their *idols of silver and gold*, their idols that they are most fond of. Many make an idol of their silver and gold, and by the love of that idol are drawn to revolt from God; but those that turn to God cast that away out of their hearts and will be ready to part with it when God calls. (3.) It shall be a reformation upon a right principle, a principle of piety, not of politics. They shall cast away their idols, because they have been unto them *for a sin*, an occasion of sin; therefore they will have nothing to do with them, though they had been the work of their *own hands*, and upon that account they had a particular fondness for them. Sin is the work of our own hands, but in working it we have been working our own ruin, and therefore we must cast it away; and those are strangely wedded to it who will not be prevailed upon to cast it away when they see that otherwise they themselves will be cast-aways. Some make this to be only a prediction that those who trust in idols, when they find they stand them in no stead, will cast them away in indignation. But it agrees so exactly with *ch. xxx. 22* that I rather

take it as a promise of a sincere reformation.

II. Jerusalem's besiegers shall be routed, and so she shall be delivered from the enemies about her walls. The former makes way for this. If a people return to God, they may leave it to him to plead their cause against their enemies. When they have cast away their idols, *then shall the Assyrian fall*, v. 8, 9. 1. The army of the Assyrians shall be laid dead upon the spot *by the sword, not of a mighty man, nor of a mean man*, not of any man at all, either Israelite or Egyptian, not forcibly by the sword of a mighty man nor surreptitiously by the sword of a mean man, but by the sword of an angel, who strikes more strongly than a mighty man and yet more secretly than a mean man, by the sword of the Lord, and his power and wrath in the hand of the angel. Thus the young men of the army shall melt, and be discomfited, and become tributaries to death. When God has work to do against the enemies of his church we expect it must be done by mighty men and mean men, officers and common soldiers; whereas God can, if he pleases, do it without either. He needs not armies of men who has legions of angels at command, Matt. xxvi. 53. 2. The king of Assyria shall flee for the same, shall flee from that invisible sword, hoping to get out of the reach of it; and he shall make the best of his way to his own dominions, shall pass over to some strong-hold of his own, for fear lest the Jews should pursue him now that his army was routed. Sennacherib had been very confident that he should make himself master of Jerusalem, and in the most insolent manner had set both God and Hezekiah at defiance; yet now he is made to tremble for fear of both. God can strike a terror into the proudest of men, and make the stoutest heart to tremble. See Job xviii. 11; xx. 24. *His princes that accompany him shall be afraid of the ensign*, shall be in a continual fright at the remembrance of the ensign in the air, which perhaps the destroying angel displayed before he gave the fatal blow. Or they shall be afraid of every ensign they see, suspecting it is a party of the Jews pursuing them. The banner that God displays for the encouragement of his people (Ps. lx. 4) will be a terror to his and their enemies. Thus he *cuts off the spirit of princes and is terrible to the kings of the earth*. But who will do this? *It is the Lord, whose fire is in Zion and his furnace in Jerusalem*. (1.) Whose residence is there, and who there keeps house, as a man does where his fire and his oven are. It is the city of the great King, and let not the Assyrians think to turn him out of the possession of his own house. (2.) Who is there a consuming fire to all his enemies, and will make them as a fiery oven in the day of his wrath, Ps. xxi. 9. He is himself *a wall of fire round about Jerusalem*, so that



whoever assaults her does so at his peril, Zech. ii. 5: Rev. xi. 5. (3.) Who has his altar there, on which the holy fire is continually kept burning and sacrifices are daily offered to his honour, and with which he is well pleased; and therefore he will defend this city, especially having an eye to the great sacrifice which was there also to be offered, of which all the sacrifices were types. If we keep up the fire of holy love and devotion in our hearts and houses, we may depend upon God to be a protection to us and them.

## CHAP. XXXII.

This chapter seems to be such a prophecy of the reign of Hezekiah as amounts to an abridgment of the history of it, and this with an eye to the kingdom of the Messiah, whose government was typified by the thrones of the house of David, for which reason he is so often called "the Son of David." Here is, I. A prophecy of that good work of reformation with which he should begin his reign, and the happy influence it should have upon the people, who had been wretchedly corrupted and debauched in the reign of his predecessor, ver. 1-8. II. A prophecy of the great disturbance that would be given to the kingdom in the middle of his reign by the Assyrian invasion, ver. 9-14. III. A promise of better times afterwards, towards the latter end of his reign, in respect both of plenty and peace (ver. 15-20), which promise may be supposed to look as far forward as the days of the Messiah.

**B**EHOLD, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment. 2 And a man shall be as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. 3 And the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken. 4 The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly. 5 The vile person shall be no more called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful. 6 For the vile person will speak villany, and his heart will work iniquity, to practise hypocrisy, and to utter error against the LORD, to make empty the soul of the hungry, and he will cause the drink of the thirsty to fail. 7 The instruments also of the churl are evil: he deviseth wicked devices to destroy the poor with lying words, even when the needy speaketh right. 8 But the liberal deviseth liberal things; and by liberal things shall he stand.

We have here the description of a flourishing kingdom. "*Blessed art thou, O land!* when it is thus with thee, when kings, princes, and people, are in their places such as they should be." It may be taken as a directory both to magistrates and subjects, what both ought to do, or as a panegyric to

Hezekiah, who ruled well and saw something of the happy effects of his good government, and it was designed to make the people sensible how happy they were under his administration and how careful they should be to improve the advantages of it, and withal to direct them to look for the kingdom of Christ, and the times of reformation which that kingdom should introduce. It is here promised and prescribed, for the comfort of the church,

I. That magistrates should do their duty in their places, and the powers answer the great ends for which they were ordained of God, v. 1, 2. 1. There shall be a king and princes that shall reign and rule; for it cannot go well when there is no king in Israel. The princes must have a king, a monarch over them as supreme, in whom they may unite; and the king must have princes under him as officers, by whom he may act, 1 Pet. ii. 13, 14. They both shall know their place and fill it up. The king shall reign, and yet, without any diminution to his just prerogative, the princes shall rule in a lower sphere, and all for the public good. 2. They shall use their power according to law, and not against it. They shall reign in righteousness and in judgment, with wisdom and equity, protecting the good and punishing the bad; and those kings and princes Christ owns as reigning by him who decree justice, Prov. viii. 15. Such a King, such a Prince, Christ himself is; he reigns by rule, and in righteousness will he judge the world, ch. ix. 7; xi. 4. 3. Thus they shall be great blessings to the people (v. 2): *A man*, that man, that king that reigns in righteousness, shall be as a hiding-place. When princes are as they should be people are as they would be. (1.) They are sheltered and protected from many mischiefs. This good magistrate is a covert to the subject from the tempest of injury and violence; he defends the poor and fatherless, that they be not made a prey of by the mighty. Whether should oppressed innocency flee, when blasted by reproach or borne down by violence, but to the magistrate as its hiding-place? To him it appeals, and by him it is righted. (2.) They are refreshed and comforted with many blessings. This good magistrate gives such countenance to those that are poor and in distress, and such encouragement to every thing that is praiseworthy, that he is as rivers of water in a dry place, cooling and cherishing the earth and making it fruitful, and as the shadow of a great rock, under which a poor traveller may shelter himself from the scorching heat of the sun in a weary land. It is a great reviving to a good man, who makes conscience of doing his duty, in the midst of contempt and contradiction, at length to be backed, and favoured, and smiled upon by a good magistrate. All this, and much more, the man Christ Jesus is to all the

willing faithful subjects of his kingdom. When the greatest evils befall us, not only the wind, but the tempest, when storms of guilt and wrath beset us and beat upon us, they drive us to Christ, and in him we are not only safe, but satisfied that we are so; in him we find rivers of water for those that hunger and thirst after righteousness, all the refreshment and comfort that a needy soul can desire, and the shadow, not of a tree, which sun or rain may beat through, but of a rock, of a great rock, which reaches a great way for the shelter of the traveller. Some observe here that as the covert, and the hiding-place, and the rock, do themselves receive the battering of the wind and storm, to save those from it that take shelter in them, so Christ bore the storm himself to keep it off from us.

II. That subjects should do their duty in their places.

1. They shall be willing to be taught, and to understand things aright. They shall lay aside their prejudices against their rulers and teachers, and submit to the light and power of truth, *v. 3.* When this blessed work of reformation is set on foot, and men do their parts towards it, God will not be wanting to do his: Then *the eyes of those that see, of the prophets, the seers, shall not be dim*; but God will bless them with visions, to be by them communicated to the people; and those that read the word written shall no longer have a veil upon their hearts, but shall see things clearly. Then *the ears of those that hear the word preached shall hearken diligently and readily receive what they hear, and not be so dull of hearing as they have been.* This shall be done by the grace of God, especially gospel-grace; *for the hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord has made, has new-made, even both of them.*

2. There shall be a wonderful change wrought in them by that which is taught them, *v. 4.* (1.) They shall have a clear head, and be able to discern things that differ, and distinguish concerning them. *The heart of those that were hasty and rash, and could not take time to digest and consider things, shall now be cured of their precipitation, and shall understand knowledge*; for the Spirit of God will open their understanding. This blessed work Christ wrought in his disciples after his resurrection (Luke xxiv. 45), as a specimen of what he would do for all his people, in giving them an understanding, 1 John v. 20. The pious designs of good princes are likely to take effect when their subjects allow themselves liberty to consider, and to think, so freely as to take things right. (2.) They shall have a ready utterance: *The tongue of the stammerers, that used to blunder whenever they spoke of the things of God, shall now be ready to speak plainly, as those that understand what they speak of, that believe,*

and therefore speak. There shall be a great increase of such clear, distinct, and methodical knowledge in the things of God, that those from whom one would not have expected it shall speak intelligently of these things, very much to the honour of God and the edification of others. Their hearts being full of this good matter, their tongues shall be *as the pen of a ready writer*, Ps. xlv. 1.

3. The differences between good and evil, virtue and vice, shall be kept up, and no more confounded by those who put darkness for light and light for darkness (*v. 5*): *The vile shall no more be called liberal.*

(1.) Bad men shall no more be preferred by the prince. When a king reigns in justice he will not put those in places of honour and power that are ill-natured, and of base and sordid spirits, and care not what injury or mischief they do so they may but compass their own ends. Such are *vile persons* (as Antiochus is called, Dan. xi. 21); when they are advanced they are called *liberal and bountiful*; they are called *benefactors* (Luke xxii. 25): but it shall not always be thus; when the world grows wiser men shall be preferred according to their merit, and honour (which was never thought seemly for a fool, Prov. xxvi. 1) shall no longer be thrown away upon such.

(2.) Bad men shall be no more had in reputation among the people, nor vice disguised with the colours of virtue. It shall no more be said to Nabal, *Thou art Nadib* (so the words are); such a covetous muck-worm as Nabal was, a fool but for his money, shall not be complimented with the title of a gentleman or a prince; nor shall they call a *churl*, that minds none but himself, does no good with what he has, but is an unprofitable burden of the earth, *My lord*; or, rather, they shall not say of him, *He is rich*; for so the word signifies. Those only are to be reckoned rich that are rich in good works; not those that have abundance, but those that use it well. In short, it is well with a people when men are generally valued by their virtue, and usefulness, and beneficence to mankind, and not by their wealth or titles of honour. Whether this was fulfilled in the reign of Hezekiah, and how far it refers to the kingdom of Christ (in which we are sure men are judged of by what they are, not by what they have, nor is any man's character mistaken), we will not say; but it prescribes an excellent rule both to prince and people, to respect men according to their personal merit. To enforce this rule, here is a description both of the vile person and of the liberal; and by it we shall see such a vast difference between them that we must quite forget ourselves if we pay that respect to the vile person and the churl which is due only to the liberal.

[1.] A vile person and a churl will do mischief, and the more if he be preferred and have power in his hand; his honours



will make him worse and not better, v. 6, 7. See the character of these base ill-conditioned men. *First*, They are always plotting some unjust thing or other, designing ill either to particular persons or to the public, and contriving how to bring it about; and so many silly piques they have to gratify, and mean revenges, that there appears not in them the least spark of generosity. Their hearts will be still working some iniquity or other. Observe, There is the work of the heart, as well as the work of the hands. As thoughts are words to God, so designs are works in his account. See what pains sinners take in sin. They labour at it; their hearts are intent upon it, and with a great deal of art and application they *work iniquity*. They *devise wicked devices* with all the subtlety of the old serpent and a great deal of deliberation, which makes the sin exceedingly sinful; and the more there is of plot and management in a sin the more there is of Satan in it. *Secondly*, They carry on their plots by trick and dissimulation. When they are meditating iniquity, they *practise hypocrisy*, feign themselves just men, Luke xx. 20. The most abominable mischiefs shall be disguised with the most plausible pretences of devotion to God, regard to man, and concern for some common good. Those are the vilest of men that intend the worst mischiefs when they speak fair. *Thirdly*, They *speak villany*. When they are in a passion you will see what they are by the base ill language they give to those about them, which no way becomes men of rank and honour; or, in giving verdict or judgment, they villanously put false colours upon things, to pervert justice. *Fourthly*, They affront God, who is a righteous God and loves righteousness: They *utter error against the Lord*, and therein they practise profaneness; for so the word which we translate *hypocrisy* signifies. They give an unjust sentence, and then profanely make use of the name of God for the ratification of it; as if, because the *judgment is God's* (Deut. i. 17), therefore their false and unjust judgment was his. This is *uttering error against the Lord*, under pretence of uttering truth and justice for him; and nothing can be more impudently done against God than to use his name to patronise wickedness. *Fifthly*, They abuse mankind, those particularly whom they are bound to protect and relieve. 1. Instead of supplying the wants of the poor, they impoverish them, they *make empty the souls of the hungry*; either taking away the food they have, or, which is almost equivalent, denying the supply which they want and which they have to give. And they *cause the drink of the thirsty to fail*; they cut off the relief they used to have, though they need it as much as ever. Those are vile persons indeed that rob the spital. 2. Instead of righting the poor, when they appeal to their judgment, they contrive to

destroy the poor, to ruin them in their courts of judicature with lying words in favour of the rich, to whom they are plainly partial; yea, though the needy speak right, though the evidence be ever so full for them to make out the equity of their cause, it is the bribe that governs them, not the right. *Sixthly*, These churls and vile persons have always bad instruments about them, that are ready to serve their villanous purposes: *All their servants are wicked*. There is no design so palpably unjust but there may be found those that would be employed as tools to put it in execution. *The instruments of the churl are evil*, and one cannot expect otherwise; but this is our comfort, that they can do no more mischief than God permits them.

[2.] One that is truly liberal, and deserves the honour of being called so, makes it his business to do good to every body according as his sphere is, v. 8. Observe, *First*, The care he takes, and the contrivances he has, to do good. He *devises liberal things*. As much as the churl or niggard projects how to save and lay up what he has for himself only, so much the good charitable man projects how to use and lay out what he has in the best manner for the good of others. Charity must be directed by wisdom, and liberal things done prudently and with device, that the good intention of them may be answered, that it may not be charity misplaced. The liberal man, when he has done all the liberal things that are in his own power, devises liberal things for others to do according to their power, and puts them upon doing them. *Secondly*, the comfort he takes, and the advantage he has, in doing good: *By liberal things he shall stand, or be established*. The providence of God will reward him for his liberality with a settled prosperity and an established reputation. The grace of God will give him abundance of satisfaction and confirmed peace in his own bosom. What disquiets others shall not disturb him; his heart is fixed. This is the recompence of charity, Ps. cxii. 5, 6. Some read it, *The prince, or honourable man, will take honourable courses; and by such honourable or ingenuous courses he shall stand or be established*. It is well with a man when the honourable of it are indeed men of honour and scorn to do a base thing, when its king is thus the son of nobles.

9 Rise up, ye women that are at ease; hear my voice, ye careless daughters; give ear unto my speech. 10 Many days and years shall ye be troubled, ye careless women: for the vintage shall fail, the gathering shall not come. 11 Tremble, ye women that are at ease; be troubled, ye careless ones: strip you, and make you

bare, and gird *sackcloth* upon your loins. 12 They shall lament for the teats, for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vine. 13 Upon the land of my people shall come up thorns and briers; yea, upon all the houses of joy in the joyous city: 14 Because the palaces shall be forsaken; the multitude of the city shall be left; the forts and towers shall be for dens for ever, a joy of wild asses, a pasture of flocks; 15 Until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest. 16 Then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. 17 And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever. 18 And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting-places; 19 When it shall hail, coming down on the forest; and the city shall be low in a low place. 20 Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters, that send forth *thither* the feet of the ox and the ass.

In these verses we have God rising up to judgment against the vile persons, to punish them for their villany; but at length returning in mercy to the liberal, to reward them for their liberality.

1. When there was so great a corruption of manners, and so much provocation given to the holy God, bad times might well be expected, and here is a warning given of such times coming. The alarm is sounded to the *women that were at ease* (v. 9) and the *careless daughters*, to feed whose pride, vanity, and luxury, their husbands and fathers were tempted to starve the poor. Let them hear what the prophet has to say to them in God's name: "*Rise up, and hear with reverence and attention.*"

1. Let them know that God was about to bring wasting desolating judgments upon the land in which they lived in pleasure and were wanton. This seems to refer primarily to the desolations made by Sennacherib's army when he seized all the fenced cities of Judah: but then those words, *many days and years*, must be rendered (as the margin reads them) *days above a year*, that is, something above a year shall this havoc be in the making: so long it was from the first entrance of that army into the land of Judah to the overthrow of it. But it is applicable

to the wretched disappointment which those will certainly meet with, first or last, that set their hearts upon the world and place their happiness in it: *You shall be troubled, you careless women*. It will not secure us from trouble to cast away care when we are at ease; nay, to those who affect to live carelessly even little troubles will be great vexations and press hard upon them. They were careless and at ease because they had money enough and mirth enough; but the prophet here tells them, (1.) That the country whence they had their rents and dainties should shortly be laid waste: "*The vintage shall fail*; and then what will you do for wine to make merry with? *The gathering of fruit shall not come*, for there shall be none to be gathered, and you will find the want of them, v. 10. You will want the *teats*, the good milk from the cows, the *pleasant fields* and their productions;" the useful fields that are serviceable to human life are the pleasant ones. "You will want the fruitful vine, and the grapes it used to yield you." The abuse of plenty is justly punished with scarcity; and those deserve to be deprived of the supports of life who make them the food and fuel of lust and prepare them for Baal. (2.) That the cities too, the cities of Judah, where they lived at ease, spent their rents, and made themselves merry with their dainties, should be laid waste (v. 13, 14). *Briers and thorns*, the fruits of sin and the curse, *shall come up*, not only upon the land of my people, which shall lie uncultivated, but upon all the houses of joy—the play-houses, the gaming-houses, the taverns—in the joyous cities. When a foreign army was ravaging the country the houses of joy, no doubt, became houses of mourning; then the palaces, or noblemen's houses, were forsaken by their owners, who perhaps fled to Egypt for refuge; the multitude of the city were left by their leaders to shift for themselves. Then the stately houses *shall be for dens for ever*, which had been as forts and towers for strength and magnificence. They shall be abandoned; the owners shall never return to them; every body shall look upon them to be like Jericho, an anathema; so that, even when peace returns, they shall not be rebuilt, but shall be thrown to the waste: *A joy of wild asses and a pasture of flocks*. Thus is many a house brought to ruin by sin. *Jam seges est ubi Troja fuit*—Corn grows on the site of Troy.

2. In the foresight of this let them tremble and be troubled, strip themselves, and gird sackcloth upon their loins, v. 11. This intimates not only that when the calamity comes they shall thus be made to tremble and be forced to strip themselves, that then God's judgments would strip them and make them bare, but, (1.) That the best prevention of the trouble would be to repent and humble themselves for their sin, and lie in the dust



before God in true remorse and godly sorrow, which would be the lengthening out of their tranquillity. This is meeting God in the way of his judgments, and saving a correction by correcting our own mistakes. Those only shall break that will not bend. (2.) That the best preparation for the trouble would be to deny themselves and live a life of mortification, and to sit loose to all the delights of sense. Those that have already by a holy contempt of this world stripped themselves can easily bear to be stripped when trouble and death come.

II. While there was still a remnant that kept their integrity they had reason to hope for good times at length and such times the prophet here gives them a pleasant prospect of. Such times they saw in the latter end of the reign of Hezekiah; but the prophecy may well be supposed to look further, to the days of the Messiah, who is *King of righteousness and King of peace*, and to whom all the prophets bear witness. Now observe,

1. How those blessed times shall be introduced—by the *pouring out of the Spirit from on high* (v. 15), which speaks not only of the good-will of God towards us, but the good work of God in us; for then, and not till then, there will be good times, when God by his grace gives men good hearts; and therefore God's *giving his Holy Spirit to those that ask him* is in effect his giving them all good things, as appears by comparing Luke xi. 13 with Matt. vii. 11. This is the great thing that God's people comfort themselves with the hopes of, that *the Spirit shall be poured out upon them*, that there shall be a more plentiful effusion of the Spirit of grace than formerly, according as the necessity of the church, in its desolate estate, calls for. This comes from on high, and therefore they look up to their Father in heaven for it. When God designs favours for his church he pours out his Spirit, both to prepare his people to receive his favours and to qualify and give success to those whom he designs to employ as instruments of his favour; for their endeavours to repair the desolations of the church are all fruitless *until the Spirit be poured out upon them*, and then the work is done suddenly. The kingdom of the Messiah was brought in, and set up, by the pouring out of the Spirit (Acts ii.), and so it is still kept up, and will be to the end.

2. What a wonderfully happy change shall then be made. That which was a *wilderness*, dry and barren, *shall become a fruitful field*, and that which we now reckon a *fruitful field*, in comparison with what it shall be then, *shall be counted for a forest*. *Then shall the earth yield her increase*. It is promised that in the days of the Messiah *the fruit of the earth shall shake like Lebanon*, Ps. lxxii. 16. Some apply this to the admission of the Gentiles into the gospel church (which made the wilderness a fruitful field),

and the rejection and exclusion of the Jews, which made that a forest which had been a fruitful field. On the Gentiles was poured out a spirit of life, but on the Jews a spirit of slumber. See what is the evidence and effect of the pouring out of the Spirit upon any soul; it is thereby made fruitful, and has its fruit unto holiness. Three things go to make these times happy:—

(1) Judgment and righteousness, v. 16. When the Spirit is poured out upon a land, *then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness* and turn it into a fruitful field, and *righteousness shall remain in the fruitful field* and make it yet more fruitful. Ministers shall expound the law and magistrates execute it, and both so judiciously and faithfully that by both the bad shall be made good and the good made better. Among all sorts of people, the poor and low and unlearned, that are neglected as the wilderness, and the rich and great and learned, that are valued as the fruitful field, there shall be right thoughts of things, good principles commanding, and conscience made of good and evil, sin and duty. Or in all parts of the land, both champaign and enclosed, country and city, the ruder parts and those that are more cultivated and refined, justice shall be duly administered. The law of Christ introduces a judgment or rule by which we must be governed, and the gospel of Christ a righteousness by which we must be saved; and, wherever the Spirit is poured out, both these dwell and remain as an everlasting righteousness.

(2.) Peace and quietness, v. 17, 18. The peace here promised is of two kinds:—

[1.] Inward peace, v. 17. This follows upon the indwelling of righteousness, v. 16. Those in whom that work is wrought shall experience this blessed product of it. It is itself peace, and the effect of it is *quietness and assurance for ever*, that is, a holy serenity and security of mind, by which the soul enjoys itself and enjoys its God, and it is not in the power of this world to disturb it in those enjoyments. Note, Peace, and quietness, and everlasting assurance may be expected, and shall be found, in the way and work of righteousness. True satisfaction is to be had only in true religion, and there it is to be had without fail. Those are the quiet and peaceable lives that are spent in *all godliness and honesty*, 1 Tim. ii. 2. *First, Even the work of righteousness shall be peace*. In the doing of our duty we shall find abundance of true pleasure, a present great reward of obedience in obedience. Though the work of righteousness may be toilsome and costly, and expose us to contempt, yet it is peace, such peace as is sufficient to bear our charges. *Secondly, The effect of righteousness shall be quietness and assurance*, not only to the end of time, of our time, and in the end, but to the endless ages of eternity. Real holiness is real happiness now and shall

be perfect happiness, that is, perfect holiness, for ever.

[2.] Outward peace, v. 18. It is a great mercy when those who by the grace of God have quiet and peaceable spirits are by the providence of God made to *dwell in quiet and peaceable habitations*, not disturbed in their houses or solemn assemblies. When the terror of Sennacherib's invasion was over, the people, no doubt, were more sensible than ever of the mercy of a quiet habitation, not disturbed with the alarms of war. Let every family study to keep itself quiet from strifes and jars within, not two against three and three against two in the house, and then put itself under God's protection to dwell safely, and to be *quiet from the fear of evil* without. Jerusalem shall be a peaceable habitation; compare *ch. xxxiii. 20*. Even *when it shall hail*, and there shall be a violent battering storm coming down on the forest that lies bleak, then shall Jerusalem be a quiet resting-place, for the city shall be low in a low place, under the wind, not exposed (as those cities are that stand high) to the fury of the storm, but sheltered by the mountains that are round about Jerusalem, Ps. cxxv. 2. The high forts and towers are brought down (v. 14), but the city that lies low shall be a quiet resting-place. Those are most safe, and may dwell most at ease, that are humble, and are willing to dwell low, v. 19. Those that would dwell in a peaceable habitation must be willing to dwell low, and in a low place. Some think here is an allusion to the preservation of the land of Goshen from the plague of hail, which made great destruction in the land of Egypt.

(3.) Plenty and abundance. There shall be such good crops gathered in every where, and every year, that the husbandmen shall be commended, and thought happy, who sow beside all waters (v. 20), who sow all the grounds that are fit for seedness, who cast their bread, or bread-corn, upon the waters, Eccl. xi. 1. God will give the increase, but then the husbandman must be industrious, and mind his business, and sow beside all waters; and, if he do this, the corn shall come up so thick and rank that he shall turn in his cattle, even the ox and the ass, to eat the tops of it and keep it under. This is applicable, [1.] To the preaching of the word. Some think it points at the ministry of the apostles, who, as husbandmen, went forth to sow their seed (Matt. xiii. 3); they sowed beside all waters; they preached the gospel wherever they came. Waters signify people, and they preached to multitudes. Wherever they found men's hearts softened, and moistened, and disposed to receive the word, they cast in the good seed. And whereas, by the law of Moses, the Jews were forbidden to plough with an ox and an ass together (Deut. xxii. 10), which intimated that Jews and Gentiles should not intermix, now that distinction

shall be taken away, and both the ox and the ass, both Jews and Gentiles, shall be employed in, and enjoy the benefit of, the gospel husbandry. [2.] To works of charity. When God sends these happy times blessed are those that improve them in doing good with what they have, that sow beside all waters, that embrace all opportunities of relieving the necessitous; for in due season they shall reap.

#### CHAP. XXXIII.

This chapter relates to the same events as the foregoing chapter, the distress of Judah and Jerusalem by Sennacherib's invasion and their deliverance out of that distress by the destruction of the Assyrian army. These are intermixed in the prophecy, in the way of a Pindaric. Observe, I. The great distress that Judah and Jerusalem should then be brought into, ver. 7-9. II. The particular frights which the sinners in Zion should then be in, ver. 13, 14. III. The prayers of good people to God in this distress, v. 2. IV. The holy security which they should enjoy in the midst of this trouble, ver. 15, 16. V. The destruction of the army of the Assyrians (ver. 1-3), in which God would be greatly glorified, ver. 5, 10-12. VI. The enriching of the Jews with the spoil of the Assyrian camp, ver. 4, 23, 24. VII. The happy settlement of Jerusalem, and the Jewish state, upon this. Religion shall be uppermost (ver. 6), and their civil state shall flourish, ver. 17-22. This was soon fulfilled, but is written for our learning.

**W**OE to thee that spoiled, and thou wast not spoiled; and dealest treacherously, and they dealt not treacherously with thee! When thou shalt cease to spoil, thou shalt be spoiled; and when thou shalt make an end to deal treacherously, they shall deal treacherously with thee. 2 O LORD, be gracious unto us; we have waited for thee: be thou their arm every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble. 3 At the noise of the tumult the people fled; at the lifting up of thyself the nations were scattered. 4 And your spoil shall be gathered like the gathering of the caterpillar: as the running to and fro of locusts shall he run upon them. 5 The LORD is exalted; for he dwelleth on high: he hath filled Zion with judgment and righteousness. 6 And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation: the fear of the LORD is his treasure. 7 Behold, their valiant ones shall cry without: the ambassadors of peace shall weep bitterly. 8 The highways lie waste, the wayfaring man ceaseth; he hath broken the covenant, he hath despised the cities, he regardeth no man. 9 The earth mourneth and languisheth: Lebanon is ashamed and hewn down: Sharon is like a wilderness; and Bashan and Carmel shake off their fruits. 10 Now will



I rise, saith the LORD; now will I be exalted; now will I lift up myself. 11 Ye shall conceive chaff, ye shall bring forth stubble: your breath, as fire, shall devour you. 12 And the people shall be as the burnings of lime: as thorns cut up shall they be burned in the fire.

Here we have,

I. The proud and false Assyrian justly reckoned with for all his fraud and violence, and laid under a woe, v. 1. Observe, 1. The sin which the enemy had been guilty of. He had spoiled the people of God, and made a prey of them, and herein had broken his treaty of peace with them, and dealt treacherously. Truth and mercy are two such sacred things, and have so much of God in them, that those cannot but be under the wrath of God that make conscience of neither, but are perfectly lost to both, that care not what mischief they do, what spoil they make, what dissimulations they are guilty of, nor what solemn engagements they violate, to compass their own wicked designs. Bloody and deceitful men are the worst of men. 2. The aggravation of this sin. He spoiled those that had never done him any injury and that he had no pretence to quarrel with, and dealt treacherously with those that had always dealt faithfully with him. Note, The less provocation we have from men to do a wrong thing the more provocation we give to God by doing it. 3. The punishment he should fall under for this sin. He that spoiled the cities of Judah shall have his own army destroyed by an angel and his camp plundered by those whom he had made a prey of. The Chaldeans shall deal treacherously with the Assyrians and revolt from them. Two of Sennacherib's own sons shall deal treacherously with him and basely murder him at his devotions. Note, The righteous God often pays sinners in their own coin. *He that leads into captivity shall go into captivity*, Rev. xiii. 10; xviii. 6. 4. The time when he shall be thus dealt with. When he shall make an end to spoil, and to deal treacherously, not by repentance and reformation, which might prevent his ruin (Dan. iv. 27), but when he shall have done his worst, when he shall have gone as far as God would permit him to go, to the utmost of his tether, then the cup of trembling shall be put into his hand. When he shall have arrived at his full stature in impiety, shall have filled up the measure of his iniquity, then all shall be called over again. When he has done God will begin, for his day is coming.

II. The praying people of God earnest at the throne of grace for mercy for the land now in its distress (v. 2): "*O Lord! be merciful to us*. Men are cruel; be thou gracious. We have deserved thy wrath, but

we entreat thy favour; and, if we may find thee propitious to us, we are happy; the trouble we are in cannot hurt us, shall not ruin us. It is in vain to expect relief from creatures; we have no confidence in the Egyptians, but *we have waited for thee only*, resolving to submit to thee, whatever the issue of the trouble be, and hoping that it shall be a comfortable issue." Those that by faith humbly wait for God shall certainly find him gracious to them. They prayed

1. For those that were employed in military services for them: "*Be thou their arm every morning*. Hezekiah, and his princes, and all the men of war, need continual supplies of strength and courage from thee; supply their need therefore, and be to them a God all-sufficient. Every morning, when they go forth upon the business of the day, and perhaps have new work to do and new difficulties to encounter, let them be afresh animated and invigorated, and, *as the day, so let the strength be*." In our spiritual warfare our own hands are not sufficient for us, nor can we bring any thing to pass unless God not only strengthen our arms (Gen. xlix. 24), but be himself our arm; so entirely do we depend upon him as our arm every morning, so constantly do we depend upon his power, as well as his compassions, which are new every morning, Lam. iii. 23. If God leaves us to ourselves any morning, we are undone; we must therefore every morning commit ourselves to him, and go forth in his strength to do the work of the day in its day. 2. For the body of the people: "*Be thou our salvation also in the time of trouble*, ours who sit still, and do not venture into the high places of the field." They depend upon God not only as their Saviour, to work deliverance for them, but as their salvation itself; for, whatever becomes of their secular interests, they will reckon themselves safe and saved if they have him for their God. If he undertake to be their Saviour, he will be their salvation; for *as for God his work is perfect*. Some read it thus: "*Thou who wast their arm every morning*, who wast the continual strength and help of our fathers before us, *be thou our salvation also in time of trouble*. Help us as thou helpedst them; *they looked unto thee and were lightened* (Ps. xxxiv. 5); let us then not walk in darkness."

III. The Assyrian army ruined and their camp made a rich but cheap and easy prey to Judah and Jerusalem. No sooner is the prayer made (v. 2) than it is answered (v. 3), nay, it is undone. They prayed that God would save them from their enemies; but he did more than that; he gave them victory over their enemies and abundant cause to triumph; for, 1. The strength of the Assyrian camp was broken (v. 3) when the destroying angel slew so many thousands of them: *At the noise of the tumult*, of the shrieks of the dying men (who, we may suppose, did not die silently), the rest of the

people fled, and shifted every one for his own safety. When God did thus lift up himself the several nations, or clans, of which the army was composed, were scattered. It was time to stir when such an unprecedented plague broke out among them. When God arises his enemies are scattered, Ps. lxxviii. 1. 2. The spoil of the Assyrian camp is seized, by way of reprisal, for all the desolations of the defended cities of Judah (v. 4): *Your spoil shall be gathered by the inhabitants of Jerusalem, like the gathering of the caterpillar, and as the running to and fro of locusts*, that is, the spoilers shall as easily and as quickly make themselves masters of the riches of the Assyrians as a host of caterpillars, or locusts, make a field, or a tree, bare. Thus the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just and Israel is enriched with the spoil of the Egyptians. Some make the Assyrians to be the caterpillars and locusts, which, when they are killed, are gathered together in heaps, as the frogs of Egypt, and are run upon and trodden to dirt.

IV. God and his Israel glorified and exalted hereby. When the spoil of the enemy is thus gathered, 1. God will have the praise of it (v. 5): *The Lord is exalted*. It is his honour thus to abase proud men, and hide them in the dust, together; thus he magnifies his own name, and his people give him the glory of it, as Israel when the Egyptians were drowned, Exod. xv. 1, 2, &c. He is exalted as one that dwells on high, out of the reach of their blasphemies, and that has an over-ruling power over them, and wherein they deal proudly delights to show himself above them—that does what he will, and they cannot resist him. 2. His people will have the blessing of it. When God lifts up himself to scatter the nations that are in confederacy against Jerusalem (v. 3) then, as a preparative for that, or as the fruit and product of it, *he has filled Zion with judgment and righteousness*, not only with a sense of justice, but with a zeal for it and a universal care that it be duly administered. It shall again be called, *The city of righteousness*, ch. i. 26. In this the grace of God is exalted, as much as his providence was in the destruction of the Assyrian army. We may conclude God has mercy in store for a people when he fills them with judgment and righteousness, when all sorts of people, and all their actions and affairs, are governed by them, and they are so full of them that no other considerations can crowd in to sway them against these. Hezekiah and his people are encouraged (v. 6) with an assurance that God would stand by them in their distress. Here is, (1.) A gracious promise of God for them to stay themselves upon: *Wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation*. Here is a desirable end proposed, and that is the stability of our times, that things

be not disturbed and unhinged at home, and the strength of salvation, deliverance from, and success against, enemies abroad. The salvation that God ordains for his people has strength in it; it is a horn of salvation. And here are the way and means for obtaining this end—*wisdom and knowledge*, not only piety, but prudence. That is it which, by the blessing of God, will be the stability of our times and the strength of salvation, that wisdom which is first pure, then peaceable, and which sacrifices private interests to a public good; such prudence as this will establish truth and peace, and fortify the bulwarks in defence of them. (2.) A pious maxim of state for Hezekiah and his people to govern themselves by: *The fear of the Lord is his treasure*. It is God's treasure in the world, from which he receives his tribute; or, rather, it is the prince's treasure. A good prince accounts it so (that wisdom is better than gold) and he shall find it so. Note, True religion is the true treasure of any prince or people; it denominates them rich. Those places that have plenty of Bibles, and ministers, and serious good people, are really rich; and it contributes to that which makes a nation rich in this world. It is therefore the interest of a people to support religion among them and to take heed of every thing that threatens to hinder it.

V. The great distress that Jerusalem was brought into described, that those who believed the prophet might know beforehand what troubles were coming and might provide accordingly, and that when the foregoing promise of their deliverance should have its accomplishment the remembrance of the extremity of their case might help to magnify God in it and make them the more thankful, v. 7—9. It is here foretold, 1. That the enemy would be very insolent and abusive and there would be no dealing with him, either by treaties of peace (*for he has broken the covenant* without any hesitation, as if it were below him to be a servant to his word), or by the preparations of war, *for he has despised the cities*; he scorns to take notice either of their appeals to justice or of their petitions for mercy. He makes himself master of them so easily (though they are called *fenced cities*), and meets with so little resistance, that he despises them, and has no relentings when he puts all to the sword; for he regards no man, has no pity or concern, no, not for those that he is under particular obligations to. He neither fears God nor regards man, but is haughty and imperious to every one. There are those that take a pride in trampling upon all mankind, and have neither veneration for the honourable nor compassion for the miserable. 2. That therefore he would not be brought to any terms of reconciliation: *The valiant ones of Jerusalem*, being unable to make their parts



good with him, must be contentedly run down with noise and insolence, which will make them cry without, because they cannot serve their country as they might have done against a fair adversary. *The ambassadors* sent by Hezekiah to treat of peace, finding him so haughty and unmanageable, *shall weep bitterly* for vexation at the disappointment they had met with in their negotiations; they shall weep like children, as despairing to find out any expedient to pacify him. 3. That the country should be made quite desolate for a time by his army. (1.) No man durst travel the roads; so that a stop was put to trade and commerce, and (which was worse) no man could safely go up to Jerusalem, to keep the solemn feasts: *The highways lie waste*. While the fields lie waste, trodden like the highways, the highways lie waste, untrodden like the fields, *for the traveller ceases*. (2.) No man had any profit from the grounds, *v. 9*. The earth used to rejoice in its own productions for the service of God's Israel, but now the enemies of Israel eat them up, or tread them down: it *mourns and languishes*; the country looks melancholy and the country people have misery in their countenances, wanting necessary food for themselves and their families; the wonted joy of harvest is turned into lamentation, so withering and uncertain are all worldly joys. The desolation is universal. That part of the country which belonged to the ten tribes was already laid waste: "*Lebanon* famed for cedars, *Sharon* for roses, *Bashan* for cattle, *Carmel* for corn, all very fruitful, have now become like wildernesses, *are ashamed* to be called by their old names, they are so unlike what they were. *They shake off their fruits* before their time into the hand of the spoiler, which used to be gathered seasonably by the hand of the owner."

VI. God appearing, at length, in his glory against this proud invader, *v. 10—12*. When things are brought thus to the last extremity, 1. God will magnify himself. He had seemed to sit by as an unconcerned spectator: "*But now will I arise, saith the Lord*; now will I appear and act, and therein I will be not only evidenced, but exalted." He will not only demonstrate that there is a God that judges in the earth, but that he is God over all, and higher than the highest. "*Now will I lift up myself*, will prepare for action, will act vigorously, and will be glorified in it." God's time to appear for his people is when their affairs are reduced to the lowest ebb, *when their strength is gone and there is none shut up nor left*, Deut. xxxii. 36. When all other helpers fail, then is God's time to help. 2. He will bring down the Assyrian: "You, O Assyrians! are big with hopes that you shall have all the wealth of Jerusalem for your own, and are in pain till it be so; but all your hopes shall come to nothing: *You*

*shall conceive chaff, and bring forth stubble*, which is not only worthless and good for nothing, but combustible and proper fuel for the fire, which it cannot escape, when *your own breath as fire shall devour you*, that is, the breath of God's wrath, provoked against you by the breath of your sins—your malignant breath, the threatenings and slaughter you breathe out against the people of God, this shall devour you, and your blasphemous breath against God and his name." God would make their own tongues to fall upon them, and their own breath to blow the fire that should consume them; and then no wonder that the people are *as the burnings of lime* in a lime-kiln, all on fire together, and *as thorns cut up*, which are dried and withered, and therefore easily take fire and are soon burnt up. Such was the destruction of the Assyrian army; it was like the burning up of thorns, which can well be spared, or the burning of lime, which makes it good for something. The burning of that army enlightened the world with the knowledge of God's power and made his name shine brightly.

13 Hear, ye *that are* far off, what I have done; and, ye *that are* near, acknowledge my might. 14 The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? 15 He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; 16 He shall dwell on high: his place of defence *shall be* the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters *shall be* sure. 17 Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off. 18 Thine heart shall meditate terror. Where *is* the scribe? Where *is* the receiver? Where *is* he that counted the towers? 19 Thou shalt not see a fierce people, a people of deeper speech than thou canst perceive; of a stammering tongue, *that thou canst* not understand. 20 Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities: thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle *that* shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes

thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken. 21 But there the glorious LORD will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby. 22 For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; he will save us. 23 Thy tacklings are loosed; they could not well strengthen their mast, they could not spread the sail: then is the prey of a great spoil divided; the lame take the prey. 24 And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity.

Here is a preface that commands attention; and it is fit that all should attend, both near and afar off, to what God says and does (v. 13): *Hear, you that are afar off*, whether in place or time. Let distant regions and future ages hear what God has done. They do so; they will do so from the scripture, with as much assurance as those that were near, the neighbouring nations and those that lived at that time. But whoever hears what God has done, whether near or afar off, let them acknowledge his might, that it is irresistible, and that he can do every thing. Those are very stupid who hear what God has done and yet will not acknowledge his might. Now what is it that God has done which we must take notice of, and in which we must acknowledge his might?

I. He has struck a terror upon the sinners in Zion (v. 14): *Fearfulness has surprised the hypocrites*. There are sinners in Zion, hypocrites, that enjoy Zion's privileges and concur in Zion's services, but their hearts are not right in the sight of God; they keep up secret haunts of sin under the cloak of a visible profession, which convicts them of hypocrisy. Sinners in Zion will have a great deal to answer for above other sinners; and their place in Zion will be so far from being their security that it will aggravate both their sin and their punishment. Now those sinners in Zion, though always subject to secret frights and terrors, were struck with a more than ordinary consternation from the convictions of their own consciences. 1. When they saw the Assyrian army besieging Jerusalem, and ready to set fire to it and lay it in ashes, and burn the wasps in the nest. Finding they could not make their escape to Egypt, as some had done, and distrusting the promises God had made by his prophets that he would deliver them, they were at their wits' end, and ran about like men distracted, crying, "*Who among us shall dwell with devouring fire?*" Let us therefore abandon

the city, and shift for ourselves elsewhere; one had as good live in everlasting burnings as live here." *Who will stand up for us against this devouring fire?* so some read it. See here how the sinners in Zion are affected when the judgments of God are abroad; while they were only threatened they slighted them and made nothing of them; but, when they come to be executed, they run into the other extreme, then they magnify them, and make the worst of them; they call them *devouring fire* and *everlasting burnings*, and despair of relief and succour. Those that rebel against the commands of the word cannot take the comforts of it in a time of need. Or, rather, 2. When they saw the Assyrian army destroyed; for the destruction of that is the fire spoken of immediately before, v. 11, 12. When the sinners in Zion saw what dreadful execution the wrath of God made they were in a great fright, being conscious to themselves that they had provoked this God by their secretly worshipping other gods; and therefore they cry out, *Who among us shall dwell with this devouring fire*, before which so vast an army is as thorns? *Who among us shall dwell with these everlasting burnings*, which have made the Assyrians as the burnings of lime? v. 12. Thus they said, or should have said. Note, God's judgments upon the enemies of Zion should strike a terror upon the sinners in Zion, nay, David himself trembles at them, Ps. cxix. 120. God himself is this devouring fire, Heb. xii. 29. Who is able to stand before him? 1 Sam. vi. 20. His wrath will burn those everlastingly that have made themselves fuel for it. It is a fire that shall never be quenched, nor will ever go out of itself; for it is the wrath of an everlasting God preying upon the conscience of an immortal soul. Nor can the most daring sinners bear up against it, so as to bear either the execution of it or the fearful expectation of it. Let this awaken us all to flee from the wrath to come, by fleeing to Christ as our refuge.

II. He has graciously provided for the security of his people that trust in him: *Hear this, and acknowledge his power in making those that walk righteously, and speak uprightly, to dwell on high*, v. 15, 16. We have here,

1. The good man's character, which he preserves even in times of common iniquity, in divers instances. (1.) He walks righteously. In the whole course of his conversation he acts by rules of equity, and makes conscience of rendering to all their due, to God his due, as well as to men theirs. His walk is righteousness itself; he would not for a world wilfully do an unjust thing. (2.) He speaks uprightly, *uprightnesses* (so the word is); he speaks what is true and right, and with an honest intention. He cannot think one thing and speak another, nor look one way and row another. His word is to



him as sacred as his oath, and is not yea and nay. (3.) He is so far from coveting ill-gotten gain that he despises it. He thinks it a mean and sordid thing, and unbecoming a man of honour, to enrich himself by any hardship put upon his neighbour. He scorns to do a wrong thing, nay, to do a severe thing, though he might get by it. He does not over-value gain itself, and therefore easily abhors the gain that is not honestly come by. (4.) If he have a bribe at any time thrust into his hand, to pervert justice, *he shakes his hands from holding it*, with the utmost detestation, taking it as an affront to have it offered him. (5.) *He stops his ears from hearing any thing that tends to cruelty or bloodshed, or any suggestions stirring him up to revenge*, Job xxxi. 31. He turns a deaf ear to those that delight in war and entice him to *cast in his lot among them*, Prov. i. 14, 16. (6.) *He shuts his eyes from seeing evil*. He has such an abhorrence of sin that he cannot bear to see others commit it, and does himself watch against all the occasions of it. Those that would preserve the purity of their souls must keep a strict guard upon the senses of their bodies, must stop their ears to temptations, and turn away their eyes from beholding vanity.

2. The good man's comfort, which he may preserve even in times of common calamity, v. 16. (1.) He shall be safe; he shall escape the devouring fire and the everlasting burnings; he shall have access to, and communion with, that God who is a devouring fire, but shall be to him a rejoicing light. And, as to present troubles, *he shall dwell on high*, out of the reach of them, nay, out of the hearing of the noise of them; he shall not be really harmed by them, nay, he shall not be greatly frightened at them: *The floods of great waters shall not come nigh him*; or, if they should attack him, *his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks*, strong and impregnable, fortified by nature as well as art. The divine power will keep him safe, and his faith in that power will keep him easy. God, the rock of ages, will be his high tower. (2.) He shall be supplied; he shall want nothing that is necessary for him: *Bread shall be given him*, even when the siege is straitest and provisions are cut off; and *his waters shall be sure*, that is, he shall be sure of the continuance of them, so that he shall not drink his water by measure and with astonishment. Those that fear the Lord shall not want any thing that is good for them.

III. He will protect Jerusalem, and deliver it out of the hands of the invaders. This storm that threatened them should blow over, and they should enjoy a prosperous state again. Many instances are here given of this prosperity.

1. Hezekiah shall put off his sackcloth and all the sadness of his countenance, and shall appear publicly in his beauty, in his

royal robes and with a pleasing aspect (v. 17), to the great joy of all his loving subjects. Those that walk uprightly shall not only have bread given them, and their water sure, but they shall with an eye of faith see the King of kings in his beauty, the beauty of holiness, and that beauty shall be upon them.

2. The siege being raised, by which they were kept close within the walls of Jerusalem, they shall now be at liberty to go abroad upon business or pleasure without danger of falling into the enemies' hand: *They shall behold the land that is very far off*; they shall visit the utmost corners of the nation, and take a prospect of the adjacent countries, which will be the more pleasant after so long a confinement. Thus believers behold the heavenly Canaan, that land that is very far off, and comfort themselves with the prospect of it in evil times.

3. The remembrance of the fright they were in shall add to the pleasure of their deliverance (v. 18): *Thy heart shall meditate terror*, meditate it with pleasure when it is over. Thou shalt think thou still hearest the alarm in thy ears, when all the cry was, "Arm, arm, arm! every man to his post. *Where is the scribe or secretary of war?* Let him appear to draw up the muster-roll. *Where is the receiver and pay-master of the army?* Let him see what he has in bank, to defray the charge of a defence. *Where is he that counted the towers?* Let him bring in the account of them, that care may be taken to put a competent number of men in each." Or these words may be taken as Jerusalem's triumph over the vanquished army of the Assyrians, and the rather because the apostle alludes to them in his triumphs over the learning of this world, when it was baffled by the gospel of Christ, 1 Cor. i. 20. The virgin, the daughter of Zion, despises all their military preparations. Where is the scribe or muster-master of the Assyrian army? Where is their weigher (or treasurer), and where are their engineers that counted the towers? They are all either dead or fled. There is an end of them.

4. They shall no more be terrified with the sight of the Assyrians, who were a fierce people naturally, and were particularly fierce against the people of the Jews, and were of a strange language, that could understand neither their petitions nor their complaints, and therefore had a pretence for being deaf to them, nor could themselves be understood: "They are of a deeper speech than thou canst perceive, which will make them the more formidable, v. 19. Thy eyes shall no more see them thus fierce, but their countenances changed when they shall all become dead corpses."

5. They shall no more be under apprehensions of the danger of Jerusalem—Zion, and the temple there (v. 20): "Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities, the city where our solemn sacred feasts are kept, where we



used to meet to worship God in religious assemblies." The good people among them, in the time of their distress, were most in pain for Zion upon this account, that it was the city of their solemnities, that the conquerors would burn their temple and they should not have that to keep their solemn feasts in any more. In times of public danger our concern should be most about our religion, and the cities of our solemnities should be dearer to us than either our strong cities or our store-cities. It is with an eye to this that God will work deliverance for Jerusalem, because it is the city of religious solemnities: let those be conscientiously kept up, as the glory of a people, and we may depend upon God to create a defence upon that glory. Two things are here promised to Jerusalem:—(1.) A well-grounded security. It shall be a *quiet habitation* for the people of God; they shall not be molested and disturbed, as they have been, by the alarms of the sword either of war or persecution, *ch. xxix. 20.* It shall be a quiet habitation, as it is the city of our solemnities. It is desirable to be quiet in our own houses, but much more so to be quiet in God's house and have none to make us afraid there. Thus it shall be with Jerusalem; and *thy eyes shall see it*, which will be a great satisfaction to a good man, *Ps. cxxviii. 5, 6.* "*Thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem, and peace upon Israel; thou shalt live to see it and share in it.*" (2.) An unmoved stability. Jerusalem, the city of our solemnities, is indeed but a *tabernacle*, in comparison with the New Jerusalem. The present manifestations of the divine glory and grace are nothing in comparison with those that are reserved for the future state. But it is such a tabernacle as *shall not be taken down*. After this trouble is over Jerusalem shall long enjoy a confirmed peace; and her sacred privileges, which are the stakes and cords of her tabernacle, shall not be removed from her, nor any disturbance given to the course and circle of her religious services. God's church on earth is a tabernacle, which, though it may be shifted from one place to another, shall not be taken down while the world stands; for in every age Christ will have a seed to serve him. The promises of the covenant are its stakes, which shall never be removed, and the ordinances and institutions of the gospel are its cords, which shall never be broken. They are things which cannot be shaken, though heaven and earth be, but shall remain.

6. God himself will be their protector and Saviour, *v. 21, 22.* This is the principal ground of their confidence: "He that is himself *the glorious Lord* will display his glory for us and be a glory to us, such as shall eclipse the rival-glory of the enemy. God, in being a gracious Lord, is a glorious Lord; for his goodness is his glory. God will be the Saviour of Jerusalem and her glorious

Lord, (1.) As a guard against their adversaries abroad. He will be a *place of broad rivers and streams*. Jerusalem had no considerable river running by it, as most great cities have, nothing but the brook Kidron, and so wanted one of the best natural fortifications, as well as one of the greatest advantages for trade and commerce, and upon this account their enemies despised them and doubted not but to make an easy prey of them; but the presence and power of God are sufficient at any time to make up to us the deficiencies of the creature and of its strength and beauty. We have all in God, all we need or can desire. Many external advantages Jerusalem has not which other places have, but in God there is more than an equivalent. But, if there be broad rivers and streams about Jerusalem, may not these yield an easy access to the fleet of an invader? No; these are rivers and streams in which *shall go no galley with oars*, no man of war or gallant ship. If God himself be the river, it must needs be inaccessible to the enemy; they can neither find nor force their way by it. (2.) As a guide to their affairs at home. "*For the Lord is our Judge*, to whom we are accountable, to whose judgment we refer ourselves, by whose judgment we abide, and who therefore (we hope) will judge for us. *He is our lawgiver*; his word is a law to us, and to him every thought within us is brought into obedience. *He is our King*, to whom we pay homage and tribute, and an inviolable allegiance, and therefore *he will save us.*" For, as protection draws allegiance, so allegiance may expect protection, and shall have it with God. By faith we take Christ for our prince and Saviour, and as such depend upon him and devote ourselves to him. Observe with what an air of triumph, and with what an emphasis laid upon the glorious name of God, they comfort themselves with this: *Jehovah is our Judge, Jehovah is our Lawgiver, Jehovah is our King, who, being self-existent, is self-sufficient, and all-sufficient to us.*

7. The enemies shall be quite infatuated, and all their powers and projects broken, like a ship at sea in stress of weather, that cannot ride out the storm, but having her tackle torn, her masts split, and nothing wherewith to repair them, is given up for a wreck, *v. 23.* *The tacklings of the Assyrian are loosed*; they are like a ship whose tacklings are loosed, or forsaken by the ship's crew, when they give it over for lost, finding that they cannot strengthen the mast, but it will come down. They thought themselves sure of Jerusalem; but when they were just entering the port as it were, and thought all was their own, they were quite becalmed, and *could not spread their sail*, but lay wind-bound till God poured the fury of his wrath upon them. The enemies of God's church are often disarmed and unrigged when they think they have almost gained their point.



8. The wealth of their camp shall be a rich booty for the Jews: *Then is the prey of a great spoil divided.* When the greater part were slain the rest fled in confusion, and with such precipitation that (like the Syrians) they *left their tents as they were*, so that all the treasure in them fell into the hands of the besieged; and even *the lame take the prey.* Those that tarried at home did divide the spoil. It was so easy to come at that not only the strong man might make himself master of it, but even the lame man, whose hands were lame, that he could not fight, and his feet, that he could not pursue. As the victory shall cost them no peril, so the prey shall cost them no toil. And there was such abundance of it that when those who were forward, and came first, had carried off as much as they would, even the lame, who came late, found sufficient. Thus God brought good out of evil, and not only delivered Jerusalem, but enriched it, and abundantly recompensed the losses they had sustained. Thus comfortably and well do the frights and distresses of the people of God often end.

9. Both sickness and sin shall be taken away; and then sickness is taken away in mercy when this is all the fruit of it, and the recovery from it, even the taking away of sin. (1.) *The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick. As the lame shall take the prey,* so shall the sick, notwithstanding their weakness, make a shift to get to the abandoned camp and seize something for themselves; or there shall be such a universal transport of joy upon this occasion that even the sick shall, for the present, forget their sickness and the sorrows of it, and join with the public in its rejoicings; the deliverance of their city shall be their cure. Or it intimates that, whereas infectious diseases are commonly the effect of long sieges, it shall not be so with Jerusalem, but the inhabitants of it with their victory and peace shall have health also, and there shall be no complaining upon the account of sickness within their gates. Or those that are sick shall bear their sickness without complaining as long as they see it goes well with Jerusalem. Our sense of private grievances should be drowned in our thanksgivings for public mercies. (2.) *The people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity,* not only the body of the nation forgiven their national guilt in the removing of the national judgment, but particular persons, that dwell therein, shall repent, and reform, and have their sins pardoned. And this is promised as that which is at the bottom of all other favours; he will do so and so for them, *for he will be merciful to their unrighteousness*, Heb. viii. 12. Sin is the sickness of the soul. When God pardons the sin he heals the disease; and, when the diseases of sin are healed by pardoning mercy, the sting of bodily sickness is taken out and the cause of it removed;

so that either the inhabitant shall not be sick or at least shall not say, *I am sick.* If iniquity be taken away, we have little reason to complain of outward affliction. *Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee.*

## CHAP. XXXIV.

In this chapter we have the fatal doom of all the nations that are enemies to God's church and people, though Edom only is mentioned, because of the old enmity of Esau to Jacob, which was typical, as much as that more ancient enmity of Cain to Abel, and flowed from the original enmity of the serpent to the seed of the woman. It is probable that this prophecy had its accomplishment in the great desolations made by the Assyrian army first, or rather by Nebuchadnezzar's army some time after, among those nations that were neighbours to Israel and had been in some way or other injurious to them. That mighty conqueror took a pride in shedding blood, and laying countries waste, and therein, quite beyond his design, he was fulfilling what God here threatened against his and his people's enemies. But we have reason to think it is intended as a denunciation of the wrath of God against all those who fight against the interests of his kingdom among men; that it has its frequent accomplishment in the havoc made by the wars of the nations and other desolating judgments, and will have its full accomplishment in the final dissolution of all things at the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. Here is, I. A demand of universal attention, ver. 1. II. A dreadful scene of blood and confusion presented, ver. 2-7. III. The reason given for these judgments, ver. 8. IV. The continuance of this desolation, the country being made like the lake of Sodom (ver. 9, 10), and the cities abandoned to wild beasts and melancholy fowls, ver. 11. -15. V. The solemn ratification of all this, ver. 16, 17. Let us hear, and fear.

COME near, ye nations, to hear; and hearken, ye people: let the earth hear, and all that is therein; the world, and all things that come forth of it. 2 For the indignation of the LORD is upon all nations, and his fury upon all their armies: he hath utterly destroyed them, he hath delivered them to the slaughter. 3 Their slain also shall be cast out, and their stink shall come up out of their carcases, and the mountains shall be melted with their blood. 4 And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig-tree. 5 For my sword shall be bathed in heaven: behold, it shall come down upon Idumea, and upon the people of my curse, to judgment. 6 The sword of the LORD is filled with blood, it is made fat with fatness, and with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams: for the LORD hath a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Idumea. 7 And the unicorns shall come down with them, and the bullocks with the bulls; and their land shall be soaked with blood, and their dust made fat with fatness. 8 For it is the day of the LORD's vengeance, and

the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion.

Here we have a prophecy, as elsewhere we have a history, of the wars of the Lord, which we are sure are all both righteous and successful. This world, as it is his creature, he does good to; but as it is in the interest of Satan, who is called *the god of this world*, he fights against it.

I. Here is the trumpet sounded and the war proclaimed, v. 1. All nations must hear and hearken, not only because what God is about to do is well worthy their remark (as *ch. xxxiii. 13*), but because they are all concerned in it; it is with them that God has a quarrel; it is against them that God is coming forth in wrath. Let them all take notice that the great God is angry with them; his indignation is upon all nations, and therefore let all nations come near to hear. *The trumpet is blown in the city* (*Amos iii. 6*), and *the watchmen on the walls cry, Harken to the sound of the trumpet*, *Jer. vi. 17. Let the earth hear, and the fulness thereof, for it is the Lord's* (*Ps. xxiv. 1*) and ought to hearken to its Maker and Master. The world must hear, and all things that come forth of it, the children of men, that are of the earth earthy, come out of it, and must return to it; or the inanimate products of the earth are called to, as more likely to hearken than sinners, whose hearts are hardened against the calls of God. *Hear, O you mountains! the Lord's controversy*, *Micah vi. 2*. It is so just a controversy that all the world may be safely appealed to concerning the equity of it.

II. Here is the manifesto published, setting forth,

1. Whom he makes war against (v. 2): *The indignation of the Lord is upon all nations*; they are all in confederacy against God and religion, all in the interests of the devil, and therefore he is angry with them all, even with all the nations that forget him. He has long suffered all nations to walk in their own ways (*Acts xiv. 16*), but now he will no longer keep silence. As they have all had the benefit of his patience, so they must all expect now to feel his resentments. *His fury is in a special manner upon all their armies*, (1.) Because with them they have done mischief to the people of God; those are they that have made bloody work with them, and therefore they must be sure to have blood given them to drink. (2.) Because with them they hope to make their part good against the justice and power of God; they trust to them as their defence, and therefore on them, in the first place, God's fury will come. Armies before God's fury are but as dry stubble before a consuming fire, though ever so numerous and courageous.

2. Whom he makes war for, and what are the grounds and reasons of the war

(v. 8): *It is the day of the Lord's vengeance*, and he it is to whom vengeance belongs, and who is never unrighteous in taking vengeance, *Rom. iii. 5*. As there is a day of the Lord's patience, so there will be a day of his vengeance; for, though he bear long, he will not bear always. It is *the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion*. Zion is the holy city, the city of our solemnities, a type and figure of the church of God in the world. Zion has a just quarrel with her neighbours for the wrongs they have done her, for all their treacherous and barbarous usage of her, profaning her holy things, laying waste her palaces, and slaying her sons. She has left it to God to plead her cause, and he will do so when the time, even the set time, to favour Zion shall have come; then he will recompense to her persecutors and oppressors all the mischiefs they have done her. The controversy will be decided, that Zion has been wronged, and therein Zion's God has been himself abused. Judgment will be given upon this decision, and execution done. Note, There is a time prefixed in the divine counsels for the deliverance of the church and the destruction of her enemies, a year of the redeemed, which will come, *a year of recompences for the controversy of Zion*; and we must patiently wait till then, and judge nothing before the time.

III. Here are the operations of the war, and the methods of it, settled, with an infallible assurance of success. 1. The sword of the Lord is bathed in heaven; this is all the preparation here made for the war, v. 5. It may probably allude to some custom they had then of bathing their swords in some liquor or other, to harden them or brighten them; it is the same with the furbishing of it, that it may glitter, *Ezek. xxi. 9—11*. God's sword is bathed in heaven, in his counsel and decree, in his justice and power, and then there is no standing before it. 2. *It shall come down*. What he has determined shall without fail be put in execution. It shall come down from heaven, and the higher the place is, whence it comes, the heavier will it fall. It will come down upon Idumea, the people of God's curse, the people that lie under his curse and are by it doomed to destruction. Miserable, for ever miserable, are those that have by their sins made themselves the people of God's curse; for the sword of the Lord will infallibly attend the curse of the Lord and execute the sentences of it; and those whom he curses are cursed indeed. It shall come down to judgment, to execute judgment upon sinners. Note, God's sword of war is always a sword of justice. It is observed of him out or whose mouth goeth the sharp sword that in righteousness he doth judge and make war, *Rev. xix. 11, 15*. 3. The nations and their armies shall be given up to the sword (v. 2): *God has delivered them to the slaughter*, and then they cannot deliver themselves, nor



can all the friends they have deliver them from it. Those only are slain whom God delivers to the slaughter, for the keys of death are in his hand; and, in delivering them to the slaughter, he has *utterly destroyed* them; their destruction is as sure, when God has doomed them to it, as if they were destroyed already, utterly destroyed. God has, in effect, delivered all the cruel enemies of his church to the slaughter by that word (Rev. xiii. 10), *He that kills with the sword must be killed by the sword*, for the Lord is righteous. 4. Pursuant to the sentence, a terrible slaughter shall be made among them (v. 6): *The sword of the Lord*, when it comes down with commission, does vast execution; it is *filled*, satiated, surfeited, *with blood*, the blood of the slain, and *made fat with their fatness*. When the day of God's abused mercy and patience is over the sword of his justice gives no quarter, spares none. Men have by sin lost the honour of the human nature and made themselves like the beasts that perish; they are therefore justly denied the compassion and respect that are owing to the human nature and killed as beasts, and no more is made of slaying an army of men than of butchering a flock of lambs or goats and feeding on the fat of the kidneys of rams. Nay, the sword of the Lord shall not only dispatch the lambs and goats, the infantry of their armies, the poor common soldiers, but (v. 7) *the unicorns too shall be made to come down with them, and the bullocks with the bulls*, though they are ever so proud, and strong, and fierce (*the great men, and the mighty men, and the chief captains* Rev. vi. 15), the sword of the Lord will make as easy a prey of as of the lambs and the goats. The greatest of men are nothing before the wrath of the great God. See what bloody work will be made: *The land shall be soaked with blood*, as with the rain that comes often upon it and in great abundance; and *their dust*, their dry and barren land, shall be *made fat with the fatness of men slain in their full strength*, as with manure. Nay even *the mountains*, which are hard and rocky, *shall be melted with their blood*, v. 3. These expressions are hyperbolic (as St. John's vision of *blood to the horse-bridles*, Rev. xiv. 20), and are made use of because they sound very dreadful to sense (it makes us even shiver to think of such abundance of human gore), and are therefore proper to express the terror of God's wrath, which is dreadful beyond conception and expression. See what work sin and wrath make even in this world, and think how much more terrible the wrath to come is, which will bring down the unicorns themselves to the bars of the pit. 5. This great slaughter will be a great sacrifice to the justice of God (v. 6): *The Lord has a sacrifice in Bozrah*; there it is that the great Redeemer has his *garments dyed with*

*blood*, ch. lxiii. 1. Sacrifices were intended for the honour of God, to make it appear that he hates sin and demands satisfaction for it, and that nothing but blood will make atonement; and for these ends the slaughter is made, that in it *the wrath of God may be revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*, especially their ungodly unrighteous enmity to his people, which was the sin that the Edomites were notoriously guilty of. In great sacrifices abundance of beasts were killed, hecatombs offered, and their blood poured out before the altar; and so will it be in this day of the Lord's vengeance. And thus would the whole earth have been soaked with the blood of sinners if Jesus Christ, the great propitiation, had not shed his blood for us; but those who reject him, and will not make a covenant with God by that sacrifice, will themselves fall as victims to divine wrath. Damned sinners are everlasting sacrifices, Mark ix. 48, 49. Those that sacrifice not (which is the character of the ungodly, Eccl. ix. 2) must be sacrificed. 6. These slain shall be detestable to mankind, and shall be as much their loathing as ever they were their terror (v. 3): *They shall be cast out*, and none shall pay them the respect of a decent burial; but *their stink shall come up out of their carcases*, that all people by the odious smell, as well as by the ghastly sight, may be made to conceive an indignation against sin and a dread of the wrath of God. They lie unburied, that they may remain monuments of divine justice. 7. The effect and consequence of this slaughter shall be universal confusion and desolation, as if the whole frame of nature were dissolved and melted down (v. 4): *All the host of heaven shall pine and waste away* (so the word is); the sun shall be darkened, and the moon look black, or be turned into blood; *the heavens themselves shall be rolled together as a scroll* of parchment when we have done with it, and lay it by, or as when it is shrivelled up by the heat of the fire. The stars shall fall as the leaves in autumn; all the beauty, joy, and comfort, of the vanquished nation shall be lost and done away, magistracy and government shall be abolished, and all dominion and rule, but that of the sword of war, shall fall. Conquerors, in those times, affected to lay waste the countries they conquered; and such a complete desolation is here described by such figurative expressions as will yet have a literal and full accomplishment in the dissolution of all things at the end of time, of which last day of judgment the judgments which God does now sometimes remarkably execute on sinful nations are figures, earnest, and fore-runners; and by these we should be awakened to think of that, for which reason these expressions are used here and Rev. vi. 12, 13. But they are used without a metaphor, 2 Pet. iii. 10, where we are told that *the*

*heavens shall pass away with a great noise and the earth shall be burnt up.*

9 And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. 10 It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever: from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever. 11 But the cormorant and the bittern shall possess it; the owl also and the raven shall dwell in it: and he shall stretch out upon it the line of confusion, and the stones of emptiness. 12 They shall call the nobles thereof to the kingdom, but none *shall be* there, and all her princes shall be nothing. 13 And thorns shall come up in her palaces, nettles and brambles in the fortresses thereof: and it shall be a habitation of dragons, *and* a court for owls. 14 The wild beasts of the desert shall also meet with the wild beasts of the island, and the satyr shall cry to his fellow; the screech-owl also shall rest there, and find for herself a place of rest. 15 There shall the great owl make her nest, and lay, and hatch, and gather under her shadow: there shall the vultures also be gathered, every one with her mate. 16 Seek ye out of the book of the LORD, and read: no one of these shall fail, none shall want her mate: for my mouth it hath commanded, and his spirit it hath gathered them. 17 And he hath cast the lot for them, and his hand hath divided it unto them by line: they shall possess it for ever, from generation to generation shall they dwell therein.

This prophecy looks very black, but surely it looks so further than upon Edom and Bozrah. 1. It describes the melancholy changes that are often made by the divine Providence, in countries, cities, palaces, and families. Places that have flourished and been much frequented strangely go to decay. We know not where to find the places where many great towns, celebrated in history, once stood. Fruitful countries, in process of time, are turned into barrenness, and pompous populous cities into ruinous heaps. Old decayed castles look frightful, and their ruins are almost as much dreaded as ever their garrisons were. 2. It describes the

destroying judgments which are the effects of God's wrath and the just punishment of those that are enemies to his people, which God will inflict when *the year of the redeemed has come, and the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion*. Those that aim to ruin the church can never do that, but will infallibly ruin themselves. 3. It describes the final desolation of this wicked world, which is *reserved unto fire at the day of judgment*, 2 Pet. iii. 7. The earth itself, when it, and all the works that are therein, shall be burnt up, will (for aught I know) be turned into a hell to all those that set their affections only on earthly things. However, this prophecy shows us what will be the lot of the *generation of God's curse*.

I. The country shall become like the lake of Sodom, v. 9, 10. *The streams thereof, that both watered the land and pleased and refreshed the inhabitants, shall now be turned into pitch, shall be congealed, shall look black, and shall move slowly, or not at all. Their floods to lazy streams of pitch shall turn;* so Sir R. Blackmore. *The dust thereof shall be turned into brimstone;* so combustible has sin made their land that it shall take fire at the first spark of God's wrath struck upon it; and, when it has taken fire, it shall become burning pitch; the fire shall be universal, not a house, or town, on fire, but a whole country; and it shall not be in the power of any to suppress or extinguish it. It shall burn continually, burn perpetually, and *shall not be quenched night nor day*. The torment of those in hell, or that have a hell within them in their own consciences, is without interruption; the *smoke of this fire goes up for ever*. As long as there are provoking sinners on earth, *from one generation to another*, an increase of sinful men, to *augment the fierce anger of the Lord* (Num. xxxii. 14), there will be a righteous God in heaven to punish them for it. And as long as a people keep up a succession of sinners God will have a succession of plagues for them; nor will any that fall under the wrath of God be ever able to recover themselves. It will be found, how light soever men make of it, that it is a *fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*. If the land be doomed to destruction, none shall pass through it, but travellers will choose rather to go a great way about than come within the smell of it.

II. The cities shall become like old decayed houses, which, being deserted by the owners, look very frightful, being commonly possessed by beasts of prey or birds of ill omen. See how dismally the palaces of the enemy look; the description is peculiarly elegant and fine. 1. God shall mark them for ruin and destruction. *He shall stretch out upon Bozrah the line of confusion with the stones or plummetts of emptiness*, v. 11. This intimates the equity of the sentence passed upon it; it is given according to the



rules of justice and the exact agreeableness of the execution with the sentence; the destruction is not wrought at random, but by line and level. The confusion and emptiness that shall overspread the face of the whole country shall be like that of the whole earth when it was *Tohu and Bohu* (the very words here used)—*without form and void*. Gen. i. 2. Sin will soon turn a paradise into a chaos, and sully the beauty of the whole creation. When there is confusion there will soon be emptiness; but both are appointed by the governor of the world, and in exact proportions. 2. Their great men shall be all cut off, and none of them shall dare to appear (v. 12): *They shall call the nobles of the kingdom* to take care of the arduous affairs which lie before them, but none shall be there to take this ruin under their hand, and all her princes, having the sad tidings brought them, shall be nothing, shall be at their wits' end, and not be able to stand them in stead, to shelter them from destruction.

III. Even the houses of state, and those of strength, shall become as wildernesses (v. 13); not only grass shall grow, but *thorns shall come up, in her palaces, nettles and brambles in the fortresses thereof*, and there shall be none to cut them up or tread them down. We sometimes see ruined buildings thus overgrown with rubbish. It intimates that the place shall not only be uninhabited and unfrequented where a full court used to be kept, but that it shall be under the curse of God; for thorns and thistles were the production of the curse, Gen. iii. 18.

IV. They shall become the residence and rendezvous of fearful frightful beasts and birds, which usually frequent such melancholy places, because there they may be undisturbed, and, when they are frightened thither, they help to frighten men thence. This circumstance of the desolation, being apt to strike a horror upon the mind, is much enlarged upon here, v. 11. *The cormorant shall possess it, or the pelican, which affects to be solitary* (Ps. cii. 6); and *the bittern*, which makes a hideous noise, *the owl*, a melancholy bird, *the raven*, a bird of prey, invited by the dead carcasses, shall dwell there (*with all the ill-boding monsters of the air*, Sir R. B.), all the unclean birds, which were not for the service of man, v. 13. *It shall be a habitation for dragons*, which are poisonous and hurtful.

And in their lofty rooms of state,  
Where cringing sycophants did wait,  
Dragons shall hiss and hungry wolves shall howl:  
In courts before by mighty lords possess'd  
The serpent shall erect his speckled crest,  
Or fold his circling spires to rest.

SIR R. BLACKMORE.

That which was a court for princes shall now be a court for owls or ostriches, v. 14. *The wild beasts of the desert*, the dry and

sandy country, shall meet, as it were by appointment, with the wild beasts of the island, the wet marshy country, and shall regale themselves with such a perfect desolation as they shall find there.

Leopards, and all the rav'n'ing brotherhoods  
That range the plains, or lurk in woods,  
Each other shall invite to come,  
And make this wilder place their home.  
Fierce beasts of every frightful shape and size  
Shall settle here their bloody colonies.

SIR R. BLACKMORE.

*The satyr shall cry to his fellow* to go with him to this desert place, or, being there, they shall please themselves that they have found such an agreeable habitation. There shall *the screech-owl rest*, a night-bird and an ominous one. *The great owl shall there make her nest* (v. 15) *and lay and hatch*; the breed of them shall be kept up to provide heirs for this desolate place. *The vultures*, which feast on carcasses, *shall be gathered there, every one with his mate*. Now observe, 1. How the places which men have deserted, and keep at a distance from, are proper receptacles for other animals, which the providence of God takes care of, and will not neglect. 2. Whom those resemble that are morose, unsociable, and unconvertible, and affect a melancholy retirement; they are like these solitary creatures that take delight in desolations. 3. What a dismal change sin makes; it turns a fruitful land into barrenness, a frequented city into a wilderness.

V. Here is an assurance given of the full accomplishment of this prediction, even to the most minute circumstance of it (v. 16, 17): "*Seek you out of the book of the Lord and read*. When this destruction comes compare the event with the prediction, and you will find it to answer exactly." Note, The book of the prophets is the book of the Lord, and we ought to consult it and converse with it as of divine origin and authority. We must not only read it, but seek out of it, search into it, turn first to one text and then to another and compare them together. Abundance of useful knowledge might thus be extracted, by a diligent search, out of the scriptures, which cannot be got by a superficial reading of them. When you have read the prediction out of the book of the Lord then observe, 1. That according to what you have read so you see; *not one of these shall fail*, either beast or fowl: and, it being foretold that they shall possess it *from generation to generation*, in order to that, that the species may be propagated, *none shall want her mate*; these marks of desolation shall be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the land. 2. That God's mouth having commanded this direful muster *his Spirit shall gather them*, as the creatures by instinct were gathered to Adam to be named and to Noah to be housed. What God's word has appointed his Spirit will effect and bring about, for no word of



God shall fall to the ground. The word of God's promise shall in like manner be accomplished by the operations of the Spirit. 3. That there is an exact order and proportion observed in the accomplishment of this threatening: *He has cast the lot for these birds and beasts, so that each one shall know his place as readily as if it were marked by line.* See the like, Joel ii. 7, 8, *They shall not break their ranks, neither shall one thrust another.* The soothsayers among the heathen foretold events by the flight of birds, as if the fate of men depended on them. But here we find that the flight of birds is under the direction of the God of Israel: *he has cast the lot for them.* 4. That the desolation shall be perpetual: *They shall possess it for ever.* God's Jerusalem may be laid in ruins; but Jerusalem of old recovered itself out of its ruins, till it gave place to the gospel Jerusalem, which may be brought low, but shall be rebuilt, and shall continue till it give place to the heavenly Jerusalem. But the enemies of the church shall be for ever desolate, shall be punished with an everlasting destruction.

## CHAP. XXXV.

As after a prediction of God's judgments upon the world (ch. xxiv.) follows a promise of great mercy to be had in store for his church (chap. xxv.), so here after a black and dreadful scene of confusion in the foregoing chapter we have, in this, a bright and pleasant one, which, though it foretells the flourishing estate of Hezekiah's kingdom in the latter part of his reign, yet surely looks as far beyond that as the prophecy in the foregoing chapter does beyond the destruction of the Edomites; both were typical, and it concerns us most to look at those things which they were typical of, the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of heaven. When the world, which lies in wickedness, shall be laid in ruins, and the Jewish church, which persisted in infidelity, shall become a desolation, then the gospel church shall be set up and made to flourish. I. The Gentiles shall be brought into it, ver. 1, 2, 7. II. The well-wishers to it, who were weak and timorous, shall be encouraged, ver. 3, 4. III. Miracles shall be wrought both on the souls and on the bodies of men, ver. 5, 6. IV. The gospel church shall be conducted in the way of holiness, ver. 8, 9. V. It shall be brought at last to endless joys, ver. 10. Thus do we find more of Christ and heaven in this chapter than one would have expected in the Old Testament.

**T**HE wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. 2 It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God. 3 Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. 4 Say to them *that are* of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come *with* vengeance, *even* God *with* a recompence; he will come and save you.

In these verses we have,

I. The desert land blooming. In the foregoing chapter we had a populous and fruitful country turned into a horrid wilderness; here we have, in lieu of that, a wil-

derness turned into a good land. When the land of Judah was freed from the Assyrian army, those parts of the country that had been made as a wilderness by the ravages and outrages they committed began to recover themselves, and to look pleasantly again, and to blossom as the rose. When the Gentile nations, that had been long as a wilderness, bringing forth no fruit to God, received the gospel, joy came with it to them, Ps. lxxvii. 3, 4; xcvi. 11, 12. When Christ was preached in Samaria there was *great joy in that city* (Acts viii. 8); those that sat in darkness saw a great and joyful light, and then they blossomed, that is, gave hopes of abundance of fruit; for that was it which the preachers of the gospel aimed at (John xv. 16), *to go and bring forth fruit*, Rom. i. 13; Col. i. 6. Though blossoms are not fruit, and often miscarry and come to nothing, yet they are in order to fruit. Converting grace makes the soul that was *a wilderness to rejoice with joy and singing, and to blossom abundantly.* This flourishing desert shall have all the *glory of Lebanon* given to it, which consisted in the strength and stateliness of its cedars, together with the *excellency of Carmel and Sharon*, which consisted in corn and cattle. Whatever is valuable in any institution is brought into the gospel. All the beauty of the Jewish church was admitted into the Christian church, and appeared in its perfection, as the apostle shows at large in his epistle to the Hebrews. Whatever was excellent and desirable in the Mosaic economy is translated into the evangelical institutes.

II. The glory of God shining forth: *They shall see the glory of the Lord.* God will manifest himself more than ever in his grace and love to mankind (for that is his glory and excellency), and he shall give them eyes to see it, and hearts to be duly affected with it. This is that which will make the desert blossom. The more we see by faith of the glory of the Lord and the excellency of our God the more joyful and the more fruitful shall we be.

III. The feeble and faint-hearted encouraged, v. 3, 4. God's prophets and ministers are in a special manner charged, by virtue of their office, to *strengthen the weak hands*, to comfort those who could not yet recover the fright they had been put into by the Assyrian army with an assurance that God would now return in mercy to them. This is the design of the gospel, 1. To strengthen those that are weak and to confirm them—the weak hands, which are unable either to work or fight, and can hardly be lifted up in prayer, and the feeble knees, which are unable either to stand or walk and unfit for the race set before us. The gospel furnishes us with strengthening considerations, and shows us where strength is laid up for us. Among true Christians there are many that have weak hands and



feeble knees, that are yet but babes in Christ; but it is our duty to strengthen our brethren (Luke xxii. 32), not only to bear with the weak, but to do what we can to confirm them, Rom. xv. 1; 1 Thess. v. 14. It is our duty also to strengthen ourselves, to lift up *the hands which hang down* (Heb. xii. 12), improving the strength God has given us, and exerting it. 2. To animate those that are timorous and discouraged: *Say to those that are of a fearful heart, because of their own weakness and the strength of their enemies, that are hasty (so the word is), that are for betaking themselves to flight upon the first alarm, and giving up the cause, that say, in their haste, "We are cut off and undone" (Ps. xxxi. 22), there is enough in the gospel to silence these fears; it says to them, and let them say it to themselves and one to another, Be strong, fear not. Fear is weakening; the more we strive against it the stronger we are both for doing and suffering; and, for our encouragement to strive, he that says to us, Be strong has laid help for us upon one that is mighty.*

IV. Assurance given of the approach of a Saviour: "*Your God will come with vengeance. God will appear for you against your enemies, will recompense both their injuries and your losses.*" The Messiah will come, in the fulness of time, to take vengeance on the powers of darkness, to spoil them, and make a show of them openly, to recompense those that mourn in Zion with abundant comforts. *He will come and save us.* With the hopes of this the Old-Testament saints strengthened their weak hands. He will come again at the end of time, will come in flaming fire, to recompense tribulation to those who have troubled his people, and, to those who were troubled, rest, such a rest as will be not only a final period to, but a full reward of, all their troubles, 2 Thess. i. 6, 7. Those whose *hearts tremble for the ark of God*, and who are under a concern for his church in the world, may silence their fears with this, God will take the work into his own hands. Your God will come, who pleads your cause and owns your interest, even God himself, who is God alone.

5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. 6 Then shall the lame *man* leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. 7 And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, *shall be* grass with reeds and rushes. 8 And a highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall

be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it *shall be* for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err *therein*. 9 No lion shall be there, nor *any* ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk *there*: 10 And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

"Then, when your God shall come, ever Christ, to set up his kingdom in the world, to which all the prophets bore witness, especially towards the conclusion of their prophecies of the temporal deliverances of the church, and this evangelical prophet especially—then look for great things."

I. Wonders shall be wrought in the kingdoms both of nature and grace, wonders of mercy wrought upon the children of men, sufficient to evince that it is no less than a God that comes to us. 1. Wonders shall be wrought on men's bodies (v. 5, 6): *The eyes of the blind shall be opened*; this was often done by our Lord Jesus when he was here upon earth, with a word's speaking, and one he gave sight to that was *born* blind, Matt. ix. 27; xii. 22; xx. 30; John ix. 6. By his power the ears of the deaf also were unstopped, with one word, *Ephphatha—Be opened*, Mark vii. 34. Many that were lame had the use of their limbs restored so perfectly that they could not only go, but *leap*, and with so much joy to them that they could not forbear leaping for joy, as that impotent man, Acts iii. 8. The dumb also were enabled to speak, and then no marvel that they were disposed to sing for joy, Matt. ix. 32, 33. These miracles Christ wrought to prove that he was sent of God (John iii. 2), nay, working them by his own power and in his own name, he proved that he was God, the same who at first made man's mouth, the hearing ear, and the seeing eye. When he would prove to John's disciples his divine mission he did it by miracles of this kind, in which this scripture was fulfilled. 2. Wonders, greater wonders, shall be wrought on men's souls. By the word and Spirit of Christ those that were spiritually blind were enlightened (Acts xvi. 18), those that were deaf to the calls of God were made to hear them readily, as Lydia, whose heart *the Lord opened, so that she attended*, Acts xvi. 14. Those that were impotent to every thing that is good by divine grace are made, not only able for it, but active in it, and run the way of God's commandments. Those also that were dumb, and knew not how to speak of God or to God, having their understandings opened to know him, shall



thereby have their lips opened to show forth his praise. The tongue of the dumb shall sing for joy, the joy of God's salvation. Praise shall be perfected out of the mouth of babes and sucklings.

II. The Spirit shall be poured out from on high. There shall be *waters and streams*, rivers of living water; when our Saviour spoke of these as the fulfilling of the scripture, and most probably of this scripture, the evangelist tells us, *He spoke of the Spirit* (John vii. 38, 39), as does also this prophet (ch. xxxii. 15); so here (v. 6), *in the wilderness*, where one would least expect it, *shall waters break out*. This was fulfilled when the *Holy Ghost fell upon the Gentiles* that *heard the word* (Acts x. 44); then were the fountains of life opened, whence streams flowed, that watered the earth abundantly. These waters are said to *break out*, which denotes a pleasing surprise to the Gentile world, such as brought them, as it were, into a new world. The blessed effect of this shall be that the *parched ground shall become a pool*, v. 7. Those that laboured and were heavily laden, under the burden of guilt, and were scorched with the sense of divine wrath, found rest, and refreshment, and abundant comforts in the gospel. In the *thirsty land*, where no water was, no ordinances (Ps. lxiii. 1), there shall be *springs of water*, a gospel ministry, and by that the administration of all gospel ordinances in their purity and plenty, which are *the river that makes glad the city of our God*, Ps. xlv. 4. In the *habitation of dragons*, who chose to dwell in the parched scorched ground (ch. xxxiv. 9, 13), these waters shall flow, and dispossess them, so that, *where each lay shall be grass with reeds and rushes*, great plenty of useful productions. Thus it was when Christian churches were planted, and flourished greatly, in the cities of the Gentiles, which, for many ages, had been habitations of dragons, or devils rather, as Babylon (Rev. xviii. 2); when the property of the idols' temples was altered, and they were converted to the service of Christianity, then the habitations of dragons became fruitful fields.

III. The way of religion and godliness shall be laid open: it is here called *the way of holiness* (v. 8), the way both of holy worship and a holy conversation. Holiness is the rectitude of the human nature and will, in conformity to the divine nature and will. The way of holiness is that course of religious duties in which men ought to walk and press forward, with an eye to the glory of God and their own felicity in the enjoyment of him. "When our God shall come to save us he shall chalk out to us this way by his gospel, so as it had never been before described." 1. It shall be an appointed way; not a way of sufferance, but a *highway*, a way into which we are directed by a divine authority and in which we are pro-

tected by a divine warrant. It is the King's highway, the King of kings' highway, in which, though we may be waylaid, we cannot be stopped. *The way of holiness* is the way of God's commandments; it is (as highways usually are) the *good old way*, Jer. vi. 16. 2. It shall be an appropriated way, the way in which God will bring his own chosen to himself, but *the unclean shall not pass over it*, either to defile it or to disturb those that walk in it. It is a way by itself, distinguished from the way of the world, for it is a way of separation from, and nonconformity to, this world. *It shall be for those whom the Lord has set apart for himself* (Ps. iv. 3), shall be reserved for them: *The redeemed shall walk there*, and the satisfaction they take in these *ways of pleasantness* shall be out of the reach of molestation from an evil world. *The unclean shall not pass over it*, for it shall be a fair way; those that walk in it are the *undefiled in the way*, who *escape the pollution that is in the world*. 3. It shall be a straight way: *The wayfaring men*, who choose to travel in it, *though fools*, of weak capacity in other things, shall have such plain directions from the word and Spirit of God in this way that *they shall not err therein*; not that they shall be infallible even in their own conduct, or that they shall in nothing mistake, but they shall not be guilty of any fatal misconduct, shall not so miss their way but that they shall recover it again, and get well to their journey's end. Those that are in the narrow way, though some may fall into one path and others into another, not all equally right, but all meeting at last in the same end, shall yet never fall into the broad way again; the Spirit of truth shall lead them into all truth that is necessary for them. Note, The way to heaven is a plain way, and easy to hit. *God has chosen the foolish things of the world*, and made them wise to salvation. *Knowledge is easy to him that understands*. 4. It shall be a safe way: *No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast* (v. 9), none to hurt or destroy. Those that keep close to this way keep out of the reach of Satan the roaring lion, that wicked one touches them not. Those that walk in the way of holiness may proceed with a holy security and serenity of mind, knowing that nothing can do them any real hurt; they shall be quiet from the fear of evil. It was in Hezekiah's days, some time after the captivity of the ten tribes, that God, being displeased with the colonies settled there, *sent lions among them*, 2 Kings xvii. 25. But Judah keeps her integrity, and therefore *no lions shall be there*. Those that walk in the *way of holiness* must separate themselves from the unclean and the ravenous, must *save themselves from an untoward generation*; hoping that they themselves are of the redeemed, let them walk *with the redeemed* who *shall walk there*.



## CHAP. XXXVI.

IV. The end of this way shall be everlasting joy, *v. 10*. This precious promise of peace now will end shortly in endless joys and rest for the soul. Here is good news for the citizens of Zion, rest to the weary: *The ransomed of the Lord*, who therefore ought to follow him wherever he goes (Rev. xiv. 4), *shall return and come to Zion*, 1. To serve and worship God in the church militant: they shall deliver themselves out of Babylon (Zech. ii. 7), *shall ask the way to Zion* (Jer. 1. 5), and *shall find the way* ch. lii. 12. God will open to them a door of escape out of their captivity, and it shall be an effectual door, though there be many adversaries. They shall join themselves to the gospel church, that *Mount Zion*, that *city of the living God*, Heb. xii. 22. They shall come with songs of joy and praise for their deliverance out of Babylon, where they wept upon every remembrance of Zion, Ps. cxxxvii. 1. Those that by faith are made citizens of the gospel Zion may go on their way rejoicing (Acts viii. 39); they shall sing in the ways of the Lord, and be still praising him. They rejoice in Christ Jesus, and the sorrows and sighs of their convictions are made to flee away by the power of divine consolations. Those that mourn are blessed, for they shall be comforted. 2. To see and enjoy God in the church triumphant; those that walk in the way of holiness, under the guidance of their Redeemer, shall come to Zion at last, to the heavenly Zion, shall come in a body, shall all be presented together, *faultless, at the coming of Christ's glory with exceeding joy* (Jude 24; Rev. vii. 17); they shall come with songs. When God's people returned out of Babylon to Zion they came weeping (Jer. 1. 4); but they shall come to heaven singing a new song, which no man can learn, Rev. xiv. 3. When they shall enter into the joy of their Lord it shall be what the joys of this world never could be, *everlasting joy*, without mixture, interruption, or period. It shall not only fill their hearts, to their own perfect and perpetual satisfaction, but it shall be upon their heads, as an ornament of grace and a crown of glory, as a garland worn in token of victory. Their joy shall be visible, and no longer a secret thing, as it is here in this world; it shall be proclaimed, to the glory of God and their mutual encouragement. They shall then obtain the joy and gladness which they could never expect on this side heaven; and *sorrow and sighing shall flee away* for ever, as the shadows of the night before the rising sun. Thus these prophecies, which relate to the Assyrian invasion, conclude, for the support of the people of God under that calamity, and to direct their joy, in their deliverance from it, to something higher. Our joyful hopes and prospects of eternal life should swallow up both all the sorrows and all the joys of this present time.

The prophet Isaiah is, in this and the three following chapters, an historian; for the scripture history, as well as the scripture prophecy, is given by inspiration of God, and was dictated to holy men. Many of the prophecies of the foregoing chapters had their accomplishment in Sennacherib's invading Judah and besieging Jerusalem, and the miraculous defeat he met with there; and therefore the story of this is here inserted, both for the explication and for the confirmation of the prophecy. The key of prophecy is to be found in history; and here, that we might have the reader entrance, it is, as it were, hung at the door. The exact fulfilling of this prophecy might serve to confirm the faith of God's people in the other prophecies, the accomplishment of which was at a greater distance. Whether this story was taken from the book of the Kings and added here, or whether it was first written by Isaiah here and hence taken into the book of Kings, is not material. But the story is the same almost verbatim; and it was so memorable an event that it was well worthy to be twice recorded, 2 Kings xviii. and xix., and here, and an abridgement of it likewise, 2 Chron. xxxii. We shall be but short in our observations upon this story here, having largely explained it there. In this chapter we have, I. The descent which the king of Assyria made upon Judah, and his success against all the defenced cities, ver. 1. II. The conference he desired to have with Hezekiah, and the managers on both sides, ver. 2, 3. III. Rabshakeh's railing blasphemous speech, with which he designed to frighten Hezekiah into a submission, and persuade him to surrender at discretion, ver. 4-10. IV. His appeal to the people, and his attempt to persuade them to desert Hezekiah, and to force him to surrender, ver. 11-20. V. The report of this made to Hezekiah by his agents, ver. 21, 22.

NOW it came to pass in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, that Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the defenced cities of Judah, and took them. 2 And the king of Assyria sent Rabshakeh from Lachish to Jerusalem unto king Hezekiah with a great army. And he stood by the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field. 3 Then came forth unto him Eliakim, Hilkiah's son, which was over the house, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah, Asaph's son, the recorder. 4 And Rabshakeh said unto them, Say ye now to Hezekiah, Thus saith the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence is this wherein thou trustest? 5 I say, sayest thou, (but they are but vain words) I have counsel and strength for war: now on whom dost thou trust, that thou rebellest against me? 6 Lo, thou trustest in the staff of this broken reed, on Egypt; whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it: so is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all that trust in him. 7 But if thou say to me, We trust in the Lord our God: is it not he whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away, and said to Judah and to Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar? 8 Now therefore give pledges, I pray thee, to my master the king of Assyria, and I will give thee two thousand horses, if thou

be able on thy part to set riders upon them. 9 How then wilt thou turn away the face of one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put thy trust on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen? 10 And am I now come up without the LORD against this land to destroy it? The LORD said unto me, Go up against this land and destroy it.

We shall here only observe some practical lessons. 1. A people may be in the way of their duty and yet meet with trouble and distress. Hezekiah was reforming, and his people were in some measure reformed; and yet their country is at that time invaded and a great part of it laid waste. Perhaps they began to grow remiss and cool in the work of reformation, were doing it by halves, and ready to sit down short of a thorough reformation; and then God visited them with this judgment, to put life into them and that good cause. We must not wonder if, when we are doing well, God sends afflictions to quicken us to do better, to do our best, and to press forward towards perfection. 2. That we must never be secure of the continuance of our peace in this world, nor think our mountain stands so strong that it cannot be moved. Hezekiah was not only a pious king, but prudent, both in his administration at home and in his treaties abroad. His affairs were in a good posture, and he seemed particularly to be upon good terms with the king of Assyria, for he had lately made his peace with him by a rich present (2 Kings xviii. 14), and yet that perfidious prince pours an army into his country all of a sudden and lays it waste. It is good for us therefore always to keep up an expectation of trouble, that, when it comes, it may be no surprise to us, and then it will be the less a terror. 3. God sometimes permits the enemies of his people, even those that are most impious and treacherous, to prevail far against them. The king of Assyria took all, or most, of the defended cities of Judah, and then the country would of course be an easy prey to him. Wickedness may prosper awhile, but cannot prosper always. 4. Proud men love to talk big, to boast of what they are, and have, and have done, nay and of what they will do, to insult over others, and set all mankind at defiance, though thereby they render themselves ridiculous to all wise men and obnoxious to the wrath of that God who resists the proud. But thus they think to make themselves feared, though they make themselves hated, and to carry their point by *great swelling words* of vanity, Jude 16. 5. The enemies of God's people endeavour to conquer them by frightening them, especially by frightening them from their confidence in God.

Thus Rabshakeh here, with noise and banter, runs down Hezekiah as utterly unable to cope with his master, or in the least to make head against him. It concerns us therefore, that we may keep our ground against the enemies of our souls, to keep up our spirits by keeping up our hope in God. 6. It is acknowledged, on all hands, that those who forsake God's service forfeit his protection. If that had been true which Rabshakeh alleged, that Hezekiah had thrown down God's altars, he might justly infer that he could not with any assurance trust in him for succour and relief, v. 7. We may say thus to presuming sinners, who say that they trust in the Lord and in his mercy. Is not this he whose commandments they have lived in the contempt of, whose name they have dishonoured, and whose ordinances they have slighted? How then can they expect to find favour with him? 7. It is an easy thing, and very common, for those that persecute the church and people of God to pretend a commission from him for so doing. Rabshakeh could say, *Have I now come up without the Lord?* when really he had come up *against* the Lord, ch. xxvii. 28. Those that kill the servants of the Lord think they do him service and say, *Let the Lord be glorified*. But, sooner or later, they will be made to know their error to their cost, to their confusion.

11 Then said Eliakim and Shebna and Joah unto Rabshakeh, Speak, I pray thee, unto thy servants in the Syrian language; for we understand it: and speak not to us in the Jews' language, in the ears of the people that *are* on the wall. 12 But Rabshakeh said, Hath my master sent me to thy master and to thee to speak these words? *Hath he not sent me* to the men that sit upon the wall, that they may eat their own dung, and drink their own piss with you? 13 Then Rabshakeh stood, and cried with a loud voice in the Jews' language, and said, Hear ye the words of the great king, the king of Assyria. 14 Thus saith the king. Let not Hezekiah deceive you: for he shall not be able to deliver you. 15 Neither let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD, saying, The LORD will surely deliver us: this city shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. 16 Harken not to Hezekiah: for thus saith the king of Assyria, Make *an agreement* with me *by* a present, and come out to me: and eat ye every



one of his vine, and every one of his fig-tree, and drink ye every one the waters of his own cistern; 17 Until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards. 18 *Beware* lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, The Lord will deliver us. Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? 19 Where *are* the gods of Hamath and Arphad? where *are* the gods of Sepharvaim? and have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? 20 Who *are they* among all the gods of these lands, that have delivered their land out of my hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand? 21 But they held their peace, and answered him not a word: for the king's commandment was, saying, Answer him not. 22 Then came Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah, that *was* over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah, the son of Asaph, the recorder, to Hezekiah with *their* clothes rent, and told him the words of Rabshakeh.

We may hence learn these lessons:—1. That, while princes and counsellors have public matters under debate, it is not fair to appeal to the people. It was a reasonable motion which Hezekiah's plenipotentiaries made, that this parley should be held in a language which the people did not understand (v. 11), because reasons of state are secret things and ought to be kept secret, the vulgar being incompetent judges of them. It is therefore an unfair practice, and not doing as men would be done by, to incense subjects against their rulers by base insinuations. 2. Proud and haughty scorers, the fairer they are spoken to, commonly speak the fouler. Nothing could be said more mildly and respectfully than that which Hezekiah's agents said to Rabshakeh. Besides that the thing itself was just which they desired, they called themselves his *servants*, they petitioned for it: *Speak, we pray thee*; but this made him the more spiteful and imperious. To give rough answers to those who give us soft answers is one way of rendering evil for good; and those are wicked indeed, and it is to be feared incurable, with whom that which usually turns away wrath does but make bad worse. 3. When Satan would tempt men from trusting in God, and cleaving to him, he does so by insinuating that in yielding to him they may

better their condition; but it is a false suggestion, and grossly absurd, and therefore to be rejected with the utmost abhorrence. When the world and the flesh say to us, "*Make an agreement with us and come out to us*," submit to our dominion and come into our interests, and *you shall eat every one of his own vine*," they do but deceive us, promising liberty when they would lead us into the basest captivity and slavery. One might as well take Rabshakeh's word as theirs for kind usage and fair quarter; therefore, *when they speak fair, believe them not*. Let them say what they will, there is no land like the land of promise, the holy land. 4. Nothing can be more absurd in itself, nor a greater affront to the true and living God, than to compare him with the gods of the heathen; as if he could do no more for the protection of his worshippers than they can for the protection of theirs, and as if the God of Israel could as easily be mastered as the gods of Hamath and Arphad, whereas they are vanity and a lie. They are nothing; he is the great *I AM*: they are the creatures of men's fancy and the works of men's hands; he is the Creator of all things. 5. Presumptuous sinners are ready to think that, because they have been too hard for their fellow-creatures, they are therefore a match for their Creator. This and the other nation they have subdued, and therefore the Lord himself shall not deliver Jerusalem out of their hand. But, though the potsherd may strive with the potsherds of the earth, let them not strive with the potter. 6. It is sometimes prudent not to *answer a fool according to his folly*. Hezekiah's command was, "*Answer him not*"; it will but provoke him to rail and blaspheme yet more and more; leave it to God to stop his mouth, for you cannot." They had reason enough on their side, but it would be hard to speak it to such an unreasonable adversary without a mixture of passion; and, if they should fall a railing like him, Rabshakeh would be much too hard for them at that weapon. 7. It becomes the people of God to lay to heart the dishonour done to God by the blasphemies of wicked men, though they do not think it prudent to reply to those blasphemies. Though they *answered him not a word*, yet they rent their clothes, in a holy zeal for the glory of God's name and a holy indignation at the contempt put upon it. They tore their garments when they heard blasphemy, as taking no pleasure in their own ornaments when God's honour suffered.

## CHAP. XXXVII.

In this chapter we have a further repetition of the story which we had before in the book of Kings concerning Sennacherib. In the foregoing chapter we had him conquering and threatening to conquer. In this chapter we have him falling, and at last fallen, in answer to prayer, and in fulfilment of many of the prophecies which we have met with in the foregoing chapters. Here we have, I. Hezekiah's pious reception of Rabshakeh's impious discourse, ver. 1. II. The gracious message he sent to Isaiah to desire his prayers, ver. 2–5. III. The encouraging answer which Isaiah sent to him from God, assuring him that God would plead his cause against the king of Assyria, ver. 6, 7. IV. An abusive



letter which the king of Assyria sent to Hezekiah, to the same purport with Rabshakeh's speech, ver. 8-13. V. Hezekiah's humble prayer to God upon the receipt of this letter, ver. 14-20. VI. The further full answer which God sent him by Isaiah, promising him that his affairs should shortly take a happy turn, that the storm should blow over and every thing should appear bright and serene, ver. 21-35. VII. The immediate accomplishment of this prophecy in the ruin of his army (ver. 36) and the murder of himself, ver. 37, 38. All this was largely opened, 2 Kings xix.

AND it came to pass, when king Hezekiah heard *it*, that he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD. 2 And he sent Eliakim, who *was* over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests covered with sackcloth, unto Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz. 3 And they said unto him, Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of blasphemy: for the children are come to the birth, and *there is* not strength to bring forth. 4 It may be the LORD thy God will hear the words of Rabshakeh, whom the king of Assyria his master hath sent to reproach the living God, and will reprove the words which the LORD thy God hath heard: wherefore lift up *thy* prayer for the remnant that is left. 5 So the servants of king Hezekiah came to Isaiah. 6 And Isaiah said unto them, Thus shall ye say unto your master, Thus saith the LORD, Be not afraid of the words that thou hast heard, wherewith the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. 7 Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumour, and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.

We may observe here, 1. That the best way to baffle the malicious designs of our enemies against us is to be driven by them to God and to our duty and so to fetch meat out of the eater. Rabshakeh intended to frighten Hezekiah from the Lord, but it proves that he frightens him to the Lord. The wind, instead of forcing the traveller's coat from him, makes him wrap it the closer about him. The more Rabshakeh reproaches God the more Hezekiah studies to honour him, by rendering his clothes for the dishonour done to him and attending in his sanctuary to know his mind. 2. That it well becomes great men to desire the prayers of good men and good ministers. Hezekiah sent messengers, and honourable ones, those of the first rank, to Isaiah, to desire his prayers, remembering how much his pro-

phesies of late had plainly looked towards the events of the present day, in dependence upon which, it is probable, he doubted not but that the issue would be comfortable, yet he would have it to be so in answer to prayer: *This is a day of trouble*, therefore let it be a day of prayer. 3. When we are most at a plunge we should be most earnest in prayer: Now that the *children are brought to the birth*, but *there is not strength to bring forth*, now let prayer come, and help at a dead lift. When pains are most strong let prayers be most lively; and, when we meet with the greatest difficulties, then is a time to stir up not ourselves only, but others also, to take hold on God. Prayer is the midwife of mercy, that helps to bring it forth. 4. It is an encouragement to pray though we have but some hopes of mercy (v. 4): *It may be the Lord thy God will hear; who knows but he will return and repent?* The *it may be* of the prospect of the haven of blessings should quicken us with double diligence to ply the oar of prayer. 5. When there is a remnant left, and but a remnant, it concerns us to lift up a prayer for that remnant, v. 4. The prayer that reaches heaven must be lifted up by a strong faith, earnest desires, and a direct intention to the glory of God, all which should be quickened when we come to the last stake. 6. Those that have made God their enemy we have no reason to be afraid of, for they are marked for ruin; and, though they may hiss, they cannot hurt. Rabshakeh has blasphemed God, and therefore let not Hezekiah be afraid of him, v. 6. He has made God a party to the cause by his invectives, and therefore judgment will certainly be given against him. God will certainly plead his own cause. 7. Sinners' fears are but prefaces to their falls. He shall *hear the rumour* of the slaughter of his army, which shall oblige him to retire to his own land, and there he shall be slain, v. 7. The terrors that pursue him shall bring him at last to the *king of terrors*, Job xviii. 11, 14. The curses that come upon sinners shall overtake them.

8 So Rabshakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah: for he had heard that he was departed from Lachish. 9 And he heard say concerning Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, He is come forth to make war with thee. And when he heard *it*, he sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying, 10 Thus shall ye speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying, Let not thy God, in whom thou trustest, deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. 11 Behold, thou hast heard what the kings



of Assyria have done to all lands by destroying them utterly; and shalt thou be delivered? 12 Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed, *as* Gozan, and Haran, and Rezep, and the children of Eden which *were* in Telassar? 13 Where *is* the king of Hamath, and the king of Arphad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah? 14 And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up unto the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD. 15 And Hezekiah prayed unto the LORD, saying, 16 O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest *between* the cherubims, thou *art* the God, *even* thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth: thou hast made heaven and earth. 17 Incline thine ear, O LORD, and hear; open thine eyes, O LORD, and see: and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent to reproach the living God. 18 Of a truth, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations, and their countries, 19 And have cast their gods into the fire, for they *were* no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them. 20 Now therefore, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou *art* the LORD, *even* thou only.

We may observe here, 1. That, if God give us inward satisfaction in his promise, this may confirm us in our silently bearing reproaches. God answered Hezekiah, but it does not appear that he, after deliberation, sent any answer to Rabshakeh; but, God having taken the work into his own hands, he quietly left the matter with him. So *Rabshakeh returned* to the king his master for fresh instructions. 2. Those that delight in war shall have enough of it. Sennacherib, without provocation given to him or warning given by him, went forth to war against Judah; and now with as little ceremony the king of Ethiopia goes forth to war against him, *v.* 9. Those that are quarrelsome may expect to be quarrelled with; and God sometimes checks the rage of his enemies by giving it a powerful diversion. 3. It is bad to talk proudly and profanely, but it is worse to write so, for this argues more deliberation and design, and what is written

spreads further, lasts longer, and does the more mischief. Atheism and irreligion, written, will certainly be reckoned for another day. 4. Great successes often harden sinners' hearts in their sinful ways and make them the more daring. Because the kings of Assyria have destroyed all lands (though, in fact, they were but a few that fell within their reach), therefore they doubt not but to destroy God's land; because the gods of the nations were unable to help they conclude the God of Israel is so; because the idolatrous kings of Hamath and Arphad became an easy prey to them therefore the religious reforming king of Judah must needs be so too. Thus is this proud man ripened for ruin by the sunshine of prosperity. 5. Liberty of access to the throne of grace, and liberty of speech there, are the unspeakable privilege of the Lord's people at all times, especially in times of distress and danger. Hezekiah took Sennacherib's letter, and spread it before the Lord, not designing to make any complaints against him but those grounded upon his own handwriting. Let the thing speak itself; here it is in black and white: *Open thy eyes, O Lord! and see.* God allows his praying people to be humbly free with him, to utter all their words, as Jephthah did, before him, to spread the letter, whether of a friend or an enemy, before him, and leave the contents, the concern of it, with him. 6. The great and fundamental principles of our religion, applied by faith and improved in prayer, will be of sovereign use to us in our particular exigencies and distresses, whatever they are; to them therefore we must have recourse, and abide by them; so Hezekiah did here. He encouraged himself with this, that the God of Israel is *the Lord of hosts*, of all hosts, of the hosts of Israel, to animate them, of the hosts of their enemies, to dispirit and restrain them,—that he is God *alone*, and there is none that can stand in competition with him,—that he is the *God of all the kingdoms of the earth*, and disposes of them all as he pleases; for he made heaven and earth, and therefore both can do any thing and does every thing. 7. When we are afraid of men that are great destroyers we may with humble boldness appeal to God as the great Saviour. They have indeed destroyed the nations, who had thrown themselves out of the protection of the true God by worshipping false gods, but the Lord, the God alone, is our God, our King, our lawgiver, and he will save us, who is *the Saviour of those that believe*. 8. We have enough to take hold of, in our wrestling with God by prayer, if we can but plead that his glory is interested in our case, that his name will be profaned if we are run down and glorified if we are relieved. Thence therefore will our most prevailing pleas be drawn: "Do it for thy glory's sake."

21 Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent unto Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Whereas thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria: 22 This is the word which the LORD hath spoken concerning him; The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee. 23 Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? Even against the Holy One of Israel. 24 By thy servants hast thou reproached the LORD, and hast said, By the multitude of my chariots am I come up to the height of the mountains, to the sides of Lebanon; and I will cut down the tall cedars thereof, and the choice fir-trees thereof; and I will enter into the height of his border, and the forest of his Carmel. 25 I have digged, and drunk water; and with the sole of my feet have I dried up all the rivers of the besieged places. 26 Hast thou not heard long ago, how I have done it; and of ancient times, that I have formed it? Now have I brought it to pass, that thou shouldest be to lay waste defenced cities into ruinous heaps. 27 Therefore their inhabitants were of small power, they were dismayed and confounded: they were as the grass of the field, and as the green herb, as the grass on the house-tops, and as corn blasted before it be grown up. 28 But I know thy abode, and thy going out, and thy coming in, and thy rage against me. 29 Because thy rage against me, and thy tumult, is come up into mine ears, therefore will I put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest. 30 And this shall be a sign unto thee, Ye shall eat this year such as groweth of itself; and the second year that which springeth of the same: and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruit

thereof. 31 And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward. 32 For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and they that escape out of mount Zion: the zeal of the LORD of hosts shall do this. 33 Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it. 34 By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the LORD. 35 For I will defend this city to save it for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. 36 Then the angel of the LORD went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. 37 So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. 38 And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Shazrezer his sons smote him with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Armenia: and Esar-haddon his son reigned in his stead.

We may here observe, 1. That those who receive messages of terror from men with patience, and send messages of faith to God by prayer, may expect messages of grace and peace from God for their comfort, ever when they are most cast down. Isaiah sent a long answer to Hezekiah's prayer in God's name, sent it in writing (for it was too long to be sent by word of mouth), and sent it by way of return to his prayer, relation being thereunto had: "*Whereas thou hast prayed to me, know, for thy comfort, that thy prayer is heard.*" Isaiah might have referred him to the prophecies he had delivered (particularly that *ch. x.*) and bid him pick out an answer from thence; but, that he might have abundant consolation, a message is sent him on purpose. The correspondence between earth and heaven is never let fall on God's side. 2. Those who magnify themselves, especially who magnify themselves against God and his people, do really vilify themselves, and make themselves contemptible, in the eyes of all wise men: "*The virgin, the daughter of Zion, has despised*



Sennacherib, and all his impotent malice and menaces; she knows that, while she preserves her integrity, she is sure of the divine protection, and that though the enemy may bark he cannot bite. All his threats are a jest; it is all but *brutum fulmen—a mere flash.*"

3. Those who abuse the people of God affront God himself; and he takes what is said and done against them as said and done against himself: "*Whom hast thou reproached? Even the Holy One of Israel, whom thou hast therefore reproached because he is a Holy One.*" And it aggravated the indignity Sennacherib did to God that he not only reproached him himself, but set his servants on to do the same: *By thy servants, the abjects, thou hast reproached me.*

4. Those who boast of themselves and their own achievements reflect upon God and his providence: "*Thou hast said, I have digged, and drunk water; I have done mighty feats, and will do more; and wilt not own that I have done it.*" v. 24—26. The most active men are no more than God makes them, and God makes them no more than of old he designed to make them: "*What I have formed of ancient times, in an eternal counsel, now have I brought to pass*" (for God does all according to the counsel of his will), "*that thou shouldst be to lay waste defenced cities;* it is therefore intolerable arrogance to make it thy own doing."

5. All the malice, and all the motions and projects, of the church's enemies, are under the cognizance and check of the church's God. Sennacherib was active and quick, here, and there, and every where, but God knew his going out and coming in, and had always an eye upon him, v. 28. And that was not all; he had a hand upon him too, a strict hand, a strong hand, *a hook in his nose and a bridle in his lips*, with which, though he was very headstrong and unruly, he could and would turn him back by the way which he came, v. 29. *Hitherto he shall come and no further.* God had signed Sennacherib's commission against Judah (ch. x. 6); here he supersedes it. He has frightened them, but he must not hurt them, and therefore is discharged from going any further; nay, his commitment is here signed, by which he is clapped up, to answer for what he had done beyond his commission.

6. God is his people's bountiful benefactor, as well as their powerful protector, both a sun and a shield to those that trust in him. Jerusalem shall be defended (v. 35), the besiegers shall not come into it, no, nor come before it with any regular attack, but they shall be routed before they begin the siege, v. 33. But this is not all; God will return in mercy to his people, and will do them good. Their land shall be more than ordinarily fruitful, so that their losses shall be abundantly repaired; they shall not feel any of the ill effects either of the enemies' wasting the

country or of their own being taken off from husbandry. But the earth, as at first, shall bring forth of itself, and they shall live and live plentifully upon its spontaneous productions. The blessing of the Lord can, when he pleases, make rich without the hand of the diligent. And let them not think that the desolations of their country would excuse them from observing the sabbatical year, which happened (as it should seem) the year after, and when they were not to plough or sow; no, though they had not now their usual stock beforehand for that year, yet they must religiously observe it, and depend upon God to provide for them. God must be trusted in the way of duty. 7. There is no standing before the judgments of God when they come with commission. (1.) The greatest numbers cannot stand before them: one angel shall, in one night, lay a vast army of men dead upon the spot, when God commissions him so to do, v. 36. Here are 185,000 brave soldiers in an instant turned into so many dead corpses. Many think the 76th Psalm was penned upon occasion of this defeat, where, from *the spoiling of the stout-hearted*, and sending them to sleep their long sleep (v. 5), it is inferred that God is *more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey* (v. 4), and that *he, even he, is to be feared*, v. 7. Angels are employed, more than we are aware of, as ministers of God's justice, to punish the pride and break the power of wicked men. (2.) The greatest men cannot stand before them: *The great king, the king of Assyria*, looks very little when he is forced to return, not only with shame, because he cannot accomplish what he had projected with so much assurance, but with terror and fear, lest the angel that had destroyed his army should destroy him; yet he is made to look less when his own sons, who should have guarded him, sacrificed him to his idol, whose protection he sought, v. 37, 38. God can quickly stop their breath who *breathe out threatenings and slaughter* against his people, and will do it when they have filled up the measure of their iniquity; and *the Lord is known by these judgments which he executes*, known to be a God that resists the proud. Many prophecies were fulfilled in this providence, which should encourage us, as far as they look further, and are designed as common and general assurances of the safety of the church and of all that trust in God, to depend upon God for the accomplishment of them. He that has delivered does and will deliver. Lord, forgive our enemies; but, *so let all thy enemies perish, O Lord!*

## CHAP. XXXVIII.

This chapter proceeds in the history of Hezekiah. Here is, I. His sickness, and the sentence of death he received within himself, ver. 1. II. His prayer in his sickness, ver. 2, 3. III. The answer of peace which God gave to that prayer, assuring him that he should recover, that he should live fifteen years yet, that Jerusalem should be delivered from the king of Assyria, and that, for

a sign to confirm his faith herein, the sun should go back ten degrees, ver. 4—8. And this we read and opened before, 2 Kings xx. 1, &c. But, IV. Here is Hezekiah's, thanksgiving for his recovery, which we had not before, ver. 9—20. To which are added the means used (ver. 21), and the end the good man aimed at in desiring to recover, ver. 22. This is a chapter which will enter into the thoughts, direct the devotions, and encourage the faith and hopes of those that are confined by bodily distempers; it visits those that are visited with sickness.

**I**N those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came unto him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live. <sup>2</sup> Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, <sup>3</sup> And said, Remember now, O LORD, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done *that which is good in thy sight*. And Hezekiah wept sore. <sup>4</sup> Then came the word of the LORD to Isaiah, saying, <sup>5</sup> Go, and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years. <sup>6</sup> And I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria: and I will defend this city. <sup>7</sup> And this *shall be* a sign unto thee from the LORD, that the LORD will do this thing that he hath spoken; <sup>8</sup> Behold, I will bring again the shadow of the degrees, which is gone down in the sun-dial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward. So the sun returned ten degrees, by which degrees it was gone down.

We may hence observe, among others, these good lessons:—1. That neither men's greatness nor their goodness will exempt them from the arrests of sickness and death. Hezekiah, a mighty potentate on earth and a mighty favourite of Heaven, is struck with a disease, which, without a miracle, will certainly be mortal; and this in the midst of his days, his comforts, and usefulness. *Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.* It should seem, this sickness seized him when he was in the midst of his triumphs over the ruined army of the Assyrians, to teach us always to rejoice with trembling. 2. It concerns us to prepare when we see death approaching: "*Set thy house in order, and thy heart especially; put both thy affections and thy affairs into the best posture thou canst, that, when thy Lord comes, thou mayest be found of him in peace with God, with thy own conscience, and with all men,*"

and mayest have nothing else to do but to die." Our being ready for death will make it come never the sooner, but much the easier: and those that are fit to die are most fit to live. 3. Is any afflicted with sickness? *Let him pray*, James v. 13. Prayer is a salve for every sore, personal or public. When Hezekiah was distressed by his enemies he prayed; now that he was sick he prayed. Whither should the child go, when any thing ails him, but to his Father? Afflictions are sent to bring us to our Bibles and to our knees. When Hezekiah was in health he *went up to the house of the Lord to pray*, for that was then the house of prayer. When he was sick in bed he *turned his face towards the wall*, probably towards the temple, which was a type of Christ, to whom we must look by faith in every prayer. 4. The testimony of our consciences for us that by the grace of God we have lived a good life, and have walked closely and humbly with God, will be a great support and comfort to us when we come to look death in the face. And though we may not depend upon it as our righteousness, by which to be justified before God, yet we may humbly plead it as an evidence of our interest in the righteousness of the Mediator. Hezekiah does not demand a reward from God for his good services, but modestly begs that God would remember, not how he had reformed the kingdom, taken away the high places, cleansed the temple, and revived neglected ordinances, but, which was *better than all burnt-offerings and sacrifices*, how he had approved himself to God with a single eye and an honest heart, not only in these eminent performances, but in an even regular course of holy living: *I have walked before thee in truth and sincerity, and with a perfect, that is, an upright, heart; for uprightness is our gospel perfection.* 5. God has a gracious ear open to the prayers of his afflicted people. The same prophet that was sent to Hezekiah with warning to prepare for death is sent to him with a promise that he shall not only recover, but be restored to a confirmed state of health and live fifteen years yet. As Jerusalem was distressed, so Hezekiah was diseased, that God might have the glory of the deliverance of both, and that prayer too might have the honour of being instrumental in the deliverance. When we pray in our sickness, though God send not to us such an answer as he here sent to Hezekiah, yet, if by his Spirit he bids us be of good cheer, assures us that our sins are forgiven us, that his grace shall be sufficient for us, and that, whether we live or die, we shall be his, we have no reason to say that we pray in vain. God answers us if he *strengthens us with strength in our souls*, though not with bodily strength, Ps. cxxxviii. 3. 6. A good man cannot take much comfort in his own health and prosperity unless withal he see



the welfare and prosperity of the church of God. Therefore God, knowing what lay near Hezekiah's heart, promised him not only that he should live, but that he should *see the good of Jerusalem all the days of his life* (Ps. cxxviii. 5), otherwise he cannot live comfortably. Jerusalem, which is now delivered, shall still be defended from the Assyrians, who perhaps threatened to rally again and renew the attack. Thus does God graciously provide to make Hezekiah upon all accounts easy. 7. God is *willing to show to the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel*, that they may have an unshaken faith in it, and therewith a strong consolation. God had given Hezekiah repeated assurances of his favour; and yet, as if all were thought too little, that he might expect from him uncommon favours, a sign is given him, an uncommon sign. None that we know of having had an absolute promise of living a certain number of years to come, as Hezekiah had, God thought fit to confirm this unprecedented favour with a miracle. The sign was the going back of the shadow upon the sun-dial. The sun is a faithful measurer of time, and *rejoices as a strong man to run a race*; but he that set that clock a going can set it back when he pleases, and make it to return; for the Father of all lights is the director of them.

9 The writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick, and was recovered of his sickness: 10 I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave: I am deprived of the residue of my years. 11 I said, I shall not see the LORD, *even* the LORD, in the land of the living: I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world. 12 Mine age is departed, and is removed from me as a shepherd's tent: I have cut off like a weaver my life: he will cut me off with pining sickness: from day *even* to night wilt thou make an end of me. 13 I reckoned till morning, *that*, as a lion, so will he break all my bones: from day *even* to night wilt thou make an end of me. 14 Like a crane *or* a swallow, so did I chatter: I did mourn as a dove: mine eyes fail *with looking* upward: O LORD, I am oppressed; undertake for me. 15 What shall I say? He hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done *it*: I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul. 16 O LORD, by these *things*

*men* live, and in all these *things* is the life of my spirit: so wilt thou recover me, and make me to live. 17 Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast, in love to my soul, *delivered it* from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back. 18 For the grave cannot praise thee, death can *not* celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. 19 The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I *do* this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth. 20 The LORD *was ready* to save me: therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the LORD. 21 For Isaiah had said, Let them take a lump of figs, and lay *it* for a plaster upon the boil, and he shall recover. 22 Hezekiah also had said, What *is* the sign that I shall go up to the house of the LORD?

We have here Hezekiah's thanksgiving-song, which he penned, by divine direction, after his recovery. He might have taken some of the psalms of his father David, and made use of them for his purpose; he might have found many very pertinent ones. He appointed *the Levites to praise the Lord with the words of David*, 2 Chron. xxix. 30. But the occasion here was extraordinary, and, his heart being full of devout affections, he would not confine himself to the compositions he had, though of divine inspiration, but would offer up his affections in his own words, which is most natural and genuine. He put this thanksgiving in writing, that he might review it himself afterwards, for the reviving of the good impressions made upon him by the providence, and that it might be recommended to others also for their use upon the like occasion. Note, There are writings which it is proper for us to draw up after we have been sick and have recovered. It is good to write a memorial of the affliction, and of the frame of our hearts under it,—to keep a record of the thoughts we had of things when we were sick, the affections that were then working in us,—to write a memorial of the mercies of a sick bed, and of our release from it, that they may never be forgotten,—to write a thanksgiving to God, write a sure covenant with him, and seal it,—to give it under our hands that we will never return again to folly. It is an excellent writing which Hezekiah here left, upon his recovery; and yet we find (2 Chron. xxxii. 25) that he *rendered not again accord-*

ing to the benefit done to him. The impressions, one would think, should never have worn off, and yet, it seems, they did. Thanksgiving is good, but thanksgiving is better. Now in this writing he preserves upon record,

I. The deplorable condition he was in when his disease prevailed, and his despair of recovery, v. 10—13.

1. He tells us what his thoughts were of himself when he was at the worst; and these he keeps in remembrance, (1.) As blaming himself for his despondency, and that he gave up himself for gone; whereas while there is life there is hope, and room for our prayer and God's mercy. Though it is good to consider sickness as a summons to the grave, so as thereby to be quickened in our preparations for another world, yet we ought not to make the worst of our case, nor to think that every sick man must needs be a dead man presently. He that brings low can raise up. Or, (2.) As reminding himself of the apprehensions he had of death approaching, that he might always know and consider his own frailty and mortality, and that, though he had a reprieve for fifteen years, it was but a reprieve, and the fatal stroke he had now such a dread of would certainly come at last. Or, (3.) As magnifying the power of God in restoring him when his case was desperate, and his goodness in being so much better to him than his own fears. Thus David sometimes, when he was delivered out of trouble, reflected upon the black and melancholy conclusions he had made upon his own case when he was in trouble, and what he had then said in his haste, as Ps. xxxi. 22; lxxvii. 7—9.

2. Let us see what Hezekiah's thoughts of himself were.

(1.) He reckoned that the number of his months was cut off in the midst. He was now about thirty-nine or forty years of age, and when he had a fair prospect of many years and happy ones, very happy, very many, before him. This distemper that suddenly seized him he concluded would be the cutting off of his days, that he should now be deprived of the residue of his years, which in a course of nature he might have lived (not which he could command as a debt due to him, but which he had reason to expect, considering the strength of his constitution), and with them he should be deprived not only of the comforts of life, but of all the opportunities he had of serving God and his generation. To the same purport (v. 12), "My age has departed and gone, and is removed from me as a shepherd's tent, out of which I am forcibly dislodged by the pulling of it down in an instant." Our present residence is but like that of a shepherd in his tent, a poor, mean, and cold lodging, where we are upon duty, and with a trust committed to our charge, as the shepherd has, of which we must give an account, and which will easily be taken down by the drawing of one pin or

two. But observe, It is not the final period of our age, but only the removal of it to another world, where the tents of Kedar that are taken down, coarse, black, and weather-beaten, shall be set up again in the New Jerusalem, *comely as the curtains of Solomon*. He adds another similitude: *I have cut off, like a weaver, my life*. Not that he did by any act of his own cut off the thread of his life; but, being told that he must needs die, he was forced to cut off all his designs and projects, his purposes were broken off, even the thoughts of his heart, as Job's were, ch. xvii.

11. Our days are compared to the weaver's shuttle (Job vii. 6), passing and repassing very swiftly, every throw leaving a thread behind it; and, when they are finished, the thread is cut off, and the piece taken out of the loom, and shown to our Master, to be judged of whether it be well woven or no, that we may receive according to the things done in the body. But as the weaver, when he has cut off his threads, has done his work, and the toil is over, so a good man, when his life is cut off, his cares and fatigues are cut off with it, and he rests from his labours. "But did I say, *I have cut off my life*? No, my times are not in my own hand; they are in God's hand, and it is he that will cut me off from the thrum (so the margin reads it); he has appointed what shall be the length of the piece, and, when it comes to that length, he will cut it off."

(2.) He reckoned that he should go to the gates of the grave—to the grave, the gates of which are always open; for it is still crying, *Give, give*. The grave is here put not only for the sepulchre of his fathers, in which his body would be deposited with a great deal of pomp and magnificence (for he was buried in the chief of the sepulchres of the kings, and all Judah did him honour at his death, 2 Chron. xxxii. 33), which yet he himself took no care of, nor gave any order about, when he was sick; but for the state of the dead, that is, the *sheol*, the *hades*, the invisible world, to which he saw his soul going.

(3.) He reckoned that he was deprived of all the opportunities he might have had of worshipping God and doing good in the world (v. 11): "*I said*," [1.] "*I shall not see the Lord*, as he manifests himself in his temple, in his oracles and ordinances, *even the Lord here in the land of the living*. He hopes to see him on the other side death, but he despairs of seeing him any more on this side death, as he had seen him in the sanctuary, Ps. lxxiii. 2. He shall no more see (that is, serve) the Lord in the land of the living, the land of conflict between his kingdom and the kingdom of Satan, this seat of war. He dwells much upon this: *I shall no more see the Lord, even the Lord*; for a good man wishes not to live for any other end than that he may serve God and have communion with him. [2.] "*I shall see man no more*."



He shall see his subjects no more, whom he may protect and administer justice to, shall see no more objects of charity, whom he may relieve, shall see his friends no more, who were often sharpened by his countenance, as iron is by iron. Death puts an end to conversation, and removes our acquaintance into darkness, Ps. lxxxviii. 18.

(4.) He reckoned that the agonies of death would be very sharp and severe: "*He will cut me off with pining sickness, which will waste me, and wear me off, quickly.*" The distemper increased so fast, without intermission or remission, either day or night, morning or evening, that he concluded it would soon come to a crisis and make an end of him—that God, whose servants all diseases are, would by them, *as a lion, break all his bones with grinding pain*, v. 13. He thought that next morning was the utmost he could expect to live in such pain and misery; when he had outlived the first day's illness the second day he repeated his fears, and concluded that this must needs be his last night: *From day even to night will thou make an end of me.* When we are sick we are very apt to be thus calculating our time, and, after all, we are still at uncertainty. It should be more our care how we shall get safely to another world than how long we are likely to live in this world.

II. The complaints he made in this condition (v. 14): "*Like a crane, or swallow, so did I chatter; I made a noise as those birds do when they are frightened.*" See what a change sickness makes in a little time; he that, but the other day, spoke with so much freedom and majesty, now, through the extremity of pain or deficiency of spirits, *chatters like a crane or a swallow*. Some think he refers to his praying in his affliction; it was so broken and interrupted with groanings which could not be uttered that it was more like the chattering of a crane or a swallow than what it used to be. Such mean thoughts had he of his own prayers, which yet were acceptable to God, and successful. He *mourned like a dove*, sadly, but silently and patiently. He had found God so ready to answer his prayers at other times that he could not but look upwards, in expectation of some relief now, but in vain: *his eyes failed*, and he saw no hopeful symptom, nor felt any abatement of his distemper; and therefore he prays, "*I am oppressed, quite overpowered and ready to sink; Lord, undertake for me; bail me out of the hands of the serjeant that has arrested me; be surety for thy servant for good*, Ps. cxix. 122. Come between me and the gates of the grave, to which I am ready to be hurried." When we recover from sickness, the divine pity does, as it were, beg a day for us, and undertakes we shall be forthcoming another time and answer the debt in full. And, when we receive the sentence of death within ourselves, we are undone if the divine

grace do not undertake for us to carry us through the valley of the shadow of death, and to preserve us blameless to the heavenly kingdom on the other side of it—if Christ do not undertake for us, to bring us off in judgment, and present us to his Father, and to do all that for us which we need, and cannot do for ourselves. *I am oppressed, ease me* (so some read it); for, when we are agitated by a sense of guilt and the fear of wrath, nothing will make us easy but Christ's undertaking for us.

III. The grateful acknowledgment he makes of God's goodness to him in his recovery. He begins this part of the writing as one at a stand how to express himself (v. 15): "*What shall I say?*" Why should I say so much by way of complaint when this is enough to silence all my complaints—*He has spoken unto me*; he has sent his prophet to tell me that I shall recover and live fifteen years yet; *and he himself has done it*: it is as sure to be done as if it were done already. What God has spoken he will himself do, for no word of his shall fall to the ground." God having spoken it, he is sure of it (v. 16): "*Thou wilt restore me, and make me to live*; not only restore me from this illness, but make me to live through the years assigned me." And, having this hope,

1. He promises himself always to retain the impressions of his affliction (v. 15): "*I will go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul*, as one in sorrow for my sinful distrusts and murmurings under my affliction, as one in care to make suitable returns for God's favour to me and to make it appear that I have got good by the providences I have been under. *I will go softly*, gravely and considerately, and with thought and deliberation, not as many, who, when they have recovered, live as carelessly and as much at large as ever." Or, "*I will go pleasantly*" (so some understand it); "when God has delivered me I will walk cheerfully with him in all holy conversation, as having tasted that he is gracious." Or, "*I will go softly*," that is, "mournfully, in the bitterness of my soul for my sins." Or, "*I will go softly*, even *after the bitterness of my soul*" (so it may be read); "when the trouble is over I will endeavour to retain the impression of it, and to have the same thoughts of things that I had then."

2. He will encourage himself and others with the experiences he had had of the goodness of God (v. 16): "*By these things which thou hast done for me they live*, the kingdom lives" (for the life of such a king was the life of the kingdom); "all that hear of it shall live and be comforted; by the same power and goodness that have restored me all men have their souls held in life, and they ought to acknowledge it. *In all these things is the life of my spirit*, my spiritual life, that is supported and maintained by what God has done for the preservation of



my natural life." The more we taste of the loving-kindness of God in every providence the more will our hearts be enlarged to love him and live to him, and that will be the life of our spirit. Thus our souls live, and they shall praise him.

3. He magnifies the mercy of his recovery, on several accounts.

(1.) That he was raised up from great extremity (v. 17): *Behold, for peace I had great bitterness.* When, upon the defeat of Sennacherib, he expected nothing but an uninterrupted peace to himself and his government, he was suddenly seized with sickness, which embittered all his comforts to him, and went to such a height that it seemed to be the bitterness of death itself—*bitterness, bitterness*, nothing but gall and wormwood. This was his condition when God sent him seasonable relief.

(2.) That it came from the love of God, from love to his soul. Some are spared and reprieved in wrath, that they may be reserved for some greater judgment when they have filled up the measure of their iniquities; but temporal mercies are sweet indeed to us when we can taste the love of God in them. *He delivered me because he delighted in me* (Ps. xviii. 19); and the word here signifies a very affectionate love: *Thou hast loved my soul from the pit of corruption*; so it runs in the original. God's love is sufficient to bring a soul from the pit of corruption. This is applicable to our redemption by Christ; it was in love to our souls, our poor perishing souls, that he delivered them from the bottomless pit, snatched them as brands out of everlasting burnings. *In his love and in his pity he redeemed us.* And the preservation of our bodies, as well as the provision made for them, is doubly comfortable when it is in love to our souls—when God repairs the house because he has a kindness for the inhabitant.

(3.) That it was the effect of the pardon of sin: "*For thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back, and thereby hast delivered my soul from the pit of corruption, in love to it.*" Note, [1.] When God pardons sin he casts it behind his back, as not designing to look upon it with an eye of justice and jealousy. He remembers it no more, to visit for it. The pardon does not make the sin not to have been, or not to have been sin, but not to be punished as it deserves. When we cast our sins behind our back, and take no care to repent of them, God sets them before his face, and is ready to reckon for them; but when we set them before our face in true repentance, as David did when his sin was ever before him, God casts them behind his back. [2.] When God pardons sins he pardons all, casts them all behind his back, though they have been as scarlet and crimson. [3.] The pardoning of the sin is the delivering of the soul from the pit of corruption. [4.] It is pleasant indeed to think

of our recoveries from sickness when we see them flowing from the remission of sin; then the cause is removed, and then it is in love to the soul.

(4.) That it was the lengthening out of his opportunity to glorify God in this world, which he made the business, and pleasure, and end of life. [1.] If this sickness had been his death, it would have put a period to that course of service for the glory of God and the good of the church which he was now pursuing, v. 18. Heaven indeed praises God, and the souls of the faithful, when at death they remove thither, do that work of heaven as the angels, and with the angels, there; but what is this world the better for that? What does that contribute to the support and advancement of God's kingdom among men in this state of struggle? *The grave cannot praise God*, nor the dead bodies that lie there. *Death cannot celebrate him*, cannot proclaim his perfections and favours, to invite others into his service. *Those who go down to the pit*, being no longer in a state of probation, nor living by faith in his promises, cannot give him honour by hoping for his truth. Those that lie rotting in the grave, as they are not capable of receiving any further mercy from God, so neither are they capable of offering any more praises to him, till they shall be raised at the last day, and then they shall both receive and give glory. [2.] Having recovered from it, he resolves not only to proceed, but to abound, in praising and serving God (v. 19): *The living, the living, he shall praise thee.* They may do it; they have an opportunity of praising God, and that is the main thing that makes life valuable and desirable to a good man. Hezekiah was therefore glad to live, not that he might continue to enjoy his royal dignity and the honour and pleasure of his late successes, but that he might continue to praise God. The living must praise God; they live in vain if they do not. Those that have been dying and yet are living, whose life is from the dead, are in a special manner obliged to praise God, as being most sensibly affected with his goodness. Hezekiah, for his part, having recovered from this sickness, will make it his business to praise God: "*I do it this day*; let others do it in like manner." Those that give good exhortations should set good examples, and do themselves what they expect from others. "For my part," says Hezekiah, "*the Lord was ready to save me*; he not only did save me, but he was ready to do it just then when I was in the greatest extremity; his help came in seasonably; he showed himself willing and forward to save me. *The Lord was to save me*, was at hand to do it, saved me at the first word; and therefore," First, "I will publish and proclaim his praises. I and my family, I and my friends, I and my people, will have a concert of praise to his glory: *We will sing*



my songs to the stringed instruments, that others may attend to them, and be affected with them, when they are in the most devout and serious frame in the house of the Lord." It is for the honour of God, and the edification of his church, that special mercies should be acknowledged in public praises, especially mercies to public persons, Ps. cxvi. 18, 19. *Secondly*, "I will proceed and persevere in his praises." We should do so all the days of our life, because every day of our life is itself a fresh mercy and brings many fresh mercies along with it; and, as renewed mercies call for renewed praises, so former eminent mercies call for repeated praises. It is by the mercy of God that we live, and therefore, as long as we live, we must continue to praise him, while we have breath, nay, while we have being. *Thirdly*, "I will propagate and perpetuate his praises." We should not only praise him all the days of our life, but *the father to the children should make known his truth*, that the ages to come may give God the glory of his truth by trusting to it. It is the duty of parents to possess their children with a confidence in the truth of God, which will go far towards keeping them close to the ways of God. Hezekiah, doubtless, did this himself, and yet Manasseh his son walked not in his steps. Parents may give their children many good things, good instructions, good examples, good books, but they cannot give them grace.

IV. In the last two verses of this chapter we have two passages relating to this story which were omitted in the narrative of it here, but which we had 2 Kings xx., and therefore shall here only observe two lessons from them:—1. That God's promises are intended not to supersede, but to quicken and encourage, the use of means. Hezekiah is sure to recover, and yet he must *take a lump of figs and lay it on the boil*, v. 21. We do not trust God, but tempt him, if, when we pray to him for help, we do not second our prayers with our endeavours. We must not put physicians, or physic, in the place of God, but make use of them in subordination to God and to his providence; help thyself and God will help thee. 2. That the chief end we should aim at, in desiring life and health, is that we may glorify God, and do good, and improve ourselves in knowledge, and grace, and meetness for heaven. Hezekiah, when he meant, *What is the sign that I shall recover?* asked, *What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the Lord*, there to honour God, to keep up acquaintance and communion with him, and to encourage others to serve him? v. 22. It is taken for granted that if God would restore him to health he would immediately go up to the temple with his thank-offerings. There Christ found the impotent man whom he had healed, John v. 14. The exercises of religion are so much the business and de-

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light of a good man that to be restrained from them is the greatest grievance of his afflictions, and to be restored to them is the greatest comfort of his deliverances. *Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee.*

## CHAP. XXXIX.

The story of this chapter likewise was had before, 2 Kings xx. 18, &c. It is here repeated, not only as a very memorable and improvable passage, but because it concludes with a prophecy of the captivity in Babylon; and as the former part of the prophecy of this book frequently referred to Sennacherib's invasion and the defeat of that, to which therefore the history of that was very fitly subjoined, so the latter part of this book speaks much of the Jews' captivity in Babylon and their deliverance out of that, to which therefore the first prediction of it, with the occasion thereof, is very fitly prefixed. We have here, I. The pride and folly of Hezekiah, in showing his treasures to the king of Babylon's ambassadors that were sent to congratulate him on his recovery, ver. 1, 2. II. Isaiah's examination of him concerning it, in God's name, and his confession of it, ver. 3, 4. III. The sentence passed upon him for it, that all his treasures should, in process of time, be carried to Babylon, ver. 5—7. IV. Hezekiah's penitent and patient submission to this sentence, ver. 8.

AT that time Merodach-baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah: for he had heard that he had been sick, and was recovered. 2 And Hezekiah was glad of them, and showed them the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah showed them not. 3 Then came Isaiah the prophet unto king Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men? and from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country unto me, *even* from Babylon. 4 Then said he, What have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, All that *is* in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not showed them.

Hence we may learn these lessons:—1. That humanity and common civility teach us to rejoice with our friends and neighbours when they rejoice, and to congratulate them on their deliverances, and particularly their recoveries from sickness. The king of Babylon, having heard that Hezekiah had been sick, and had recovered, sent to compliment him upon the occasion. If Christians be unneighbourly, heathens will shame them. 2. It becomes us to give honour to those whom our God puts honour upon. The sun was the Babylonians' god; and when they understood that it was with a respect to Hezekiah that the sun, to their great surprise, went back ten degrees, on such a day, they thought themselves obliged

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to do Hezekiah all the honour they could. Will all people thus walk in the name of their God, and shall not we? 3. Those that do not value good men for their goodness may yet be brought to pay them great respect by other inducements, and for the sake of their secular interests. The king of Babylon made his court to Hezekiah, not because he was pious, but because he was prosperous, as the Philistines coveted an alliance with Isaac because they saw the Lord was with him, Gen. xxvi. 28. The king of Babylon was an enemy to the king of Assyria, and therefore was fond of Hezekiah, because the Assyrians were so much weakened by the power of his God. 4. It is a hard matter to keep the spirit low in the midst of great advancements. Hezekiah is an instance of it: he was a wise and good man, but, when one miracle after another was wrought in his favour, he found it hard to keep his heart from being lifted up, nay, a little thing then drew him into the snare of pride. Blessed Paul himself needed a thorn in the flesh, to keep him from being *lifted up with the abundance of revelations*. 5. We have need to watch over our own spirits when we are showing our friends our possessions, what we have done and what we have got, that we be not proud of them, as if our might or our merit had purchased and procured us this wealth. When we look upon our enjoyments, and have occasion to speak of them, it must be with humble acknowledgments of our own unworthiness and thankful acknowledgments of God's goodness, with a just value for the achievements of others and with an expectation of losses and changes, not dreaming that our mountain stands so strong but that it may soon be moved. 6. It is a great weakness for good men to value themselves much upon the civil respects that are paid them (yea, though there be something particular and uncommon in them) by the children of this world, and to be fond of their acquaintance. What a poor thing was it for Hezekiah, whom God had so dignified, to be thus over proud of the respect paid him by a heathen prince as if that added anything to him! We ought to return the courtesies of such with interest, but not to be proud of them. 7. We must expect to be called to an account for the workings of our pride, though they are secret, and in such instances as we thought there was no harm in; and therefore we ought to call ourselves to an account for them; and when we have had company with us that have paid us respect, and been pleased with their entertainment, and commended every thing, we ought to be jealous over ourselves with a godly jealousy lest our hearts have been lifted up. As far as we see cause to suspect that this sly and subtle sin of pride has insinuated itself into our breasts, and mingled itself with our conversation, let us be ashamed of it, and, as Hezekiah here,

ingenuously confess it and take shame to ourselves for it.

5 Then said Isaiah to Hezekiah, Hear the word of the Lord of hosts: 6 Behold, the days come, that all that *is* in thine house, and *that* which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. 7 And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. 8 Then said Hezekiah to Isaiah, Good *is* the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken. He said moreover, For there shall be peace and truth in my days.

Hence let us observe, 1. That, if God love us, he will humble us, and will find some way or other to pull down our spirits when they are lifted up above measure. A mortifying message is sent to Hezekiah, that he might be humbled for the pride of his heart, and be convinced of the folly of it; for though God may suffer his people to fall into sin, as he did Hezekiah here, to *prove him, that he might know all that was in his heart*, yet he will not suffer them to lie still in it. 2. It is just with God to take that from us which we make the matter of our pride, and on which we build a carnal confidence. When David was proud of the numbers of his people God took a course to make them fewer; and when Hezekiah boasts of his treasures, and looks upon them with too great a complacency, he is told that he acts like the foolish traveller who shows his money and gold to one that proves a thief and is thereby tempted to rob him. 3. If we could but see things that will be, we should be ashamed of our thoughts of things that are. If Hezekiah had known that the seed and successors of this king of Babylon would hereafter be the ruin of his family and kingdom, he would not have complimented his ambassadors as he did; and, when the prophet told him that it would be so, we may well imagine how he was vexed at himself for what he had done. We cannot certainly foresee what will be, but are told, in general, *All is vanity*, and therefore it is vanity for us to take complacency and put confidence in any thing that goes under that character. 4. Those that are fond of an acquaintance or alliance with irreligious men will first or last have enough of it, and will have cause to repent it. Hezekiah thought himself very happy in the friendship of Babylon, though it was the mother of harlots and idolatries; but Babylon, who now courted Jerusalem, in process of time conquered her and carried her captive. Leagues with sin-



ners, and leagues with sin too, will end thus ; it is therefore our wisdom to keep at a distance from them. 5. Those that truly repent of their sins will take it well to be reproved for them and will be willing to be told of their faults. Hezekiah reckoned that word of the Lord good which discovered sin to him, and made him sensible that he had done amiss, which before he was not aware of. The language of true penitents is, *Let the righteous smite me ; it shall be a kindness ;* and the law is therefore good, because, being spiritual, in it sin appears sin, and exceedingly sinful. 6. True penitents will quietly submit, not only to the reproofs of the word, but to the rebukes of Providence for their sins. When Hezekiah was told of the punishment of his iniquity he said, *Good is the word of the Lord,* not only the mitigation of the sentence, but the sentence itself ; he has nothing to object against the equity of it, but says *Amen* to the threatening. Those that see the evil of sin, and what it deserves, will justify God in all that is brought upon them for it, and own that he punishes them less than their iniquities deserve. 7. Though we must not be regardless of those that come after us, yet we must reckon ourselves well done by if there be *peace and truth in our days*, and better than we had reason to expect. If a storm be coming, we must reckon it a favour to get into the harbour before it comes, and be gathered to the grave in peace ; yet we can never be secure of this, but must prepare for changes in our own time, that we may stand complete in all the will of God, and bid it welcome whatever it is.

## CHAP. XL.

At this chapter begins the latter part of the prophecy of this book, which is not only divided from the former by the historical chapters that come between, but seems to be distinguished from it in the scope and style of it. In the former part the name of the prophet was frequently prefixed to the particular sermons, besides the general title (as ch. ii. 1, vii. 3, xlii. 1) ; but this is all one continued discourse, and the prophet not so much as once named. That consisted of many burdens, many woes ; this consists of many blessings. There the distress which the people of God were in by the Assyrian, and their deliverance out of that, were chiefly prophesied of ; but that is here spoken of as a thing past (ch. iii. 4) ; and the captivity in Babylon, and their deliverance out of that, which were much greater events, of more extensive and abiding concern, are here largely foretold. Before God sent his people into captivity he furnished them with precious promises for their support and comfort in their trouble ; and we may well imagine of what great use to them the glorious, gracious, light of this prophecy was, in that cloudy and dark day, and how much it helped to dry up their tears by the rivers of Babylon. But it looks further yet, and to greater things ; much of Christ and gospel grace we meet with in the foregoing part of this book, but in this latter part we shall find much more ; and as if it were designed for a prophetic summary of the New Testament, it begins with that which begins the gospels, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness" (ch. xl. 3), and concludes with that which concludes the book of the Revelation, "The new heavens and the new earth," ch. lvi. 22. Even Mr. White acknowledges that, as all the mercies of God to the Jewish nation bore some resemblance to those glorious things performed by our Saviour for man's redemption, so they are by the Spirit of God expressed in such terms as show plainly that while the prophet is speaking of the redemption of the Jews he had in his thoughts a more glorious deliverance. And we need not look for any further accomplishment of these prophecies yet to come ; for if Jesus be he, and his kingdom be it, that should come, we are to look for no other, but the carrying on and completing of the same blessed work which was begun in the first preaching and planting of Christianity in the world.

In this chapter we have, I. Orders given to preach and publish the glad tidings of redemption, ver. 1, 2. II. These glad tidings introduced by a voice in the wilderness, which gives assurance that all obstructions shall be removed (ver. 3—5), and that, though all

creatures fall and fade, the word of God shall be established and accomplished, ver. 6—8. III. A joyful prospect given to the people of God of the happiness which this redemption should bring along with it, ver. 9—11. IV. The sovereignty and power of that God magnified who undertakes to work out this redemption, ver. 12—17. V. Idols therefore triumphed over and idolaters upbraided with their folly, ver. 18—25. VI. A reproof given to the people of God for their fears and dependencies, and enough said, in a few words, to silence those fears, ver. 27—31. And we, through patience and comfort of this scripture, may have hope.

**C**OMFORT ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. 2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned : for she hath received of the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

We have here the commission and instructions given, not to this prophet only, but, with him, to all the Lord's prophets, nay, and to all Christ's ministers, to proclaim comfort to God's people. 1. This did not only warrant, but enjoin, this prophet himself to encourage the good people who lived in his own time, who could not but have very melancholy apprehensions of things when they saw Judah and Jerusalem by their daring impieties ripening apace for ruin, and God in his providence hastening ruin upon them. Let them be sure that, notwithstanding all this, God had mercy in store for them. 2. It was especially a direction to the prophets that should live in the time of the captivity, when Jerusalem was in ruins ; they must encourage the captives to hope for enlargement in due time. 3. Gospel ministers, being employed by the blessed Spirit as comforters, and as helpers of the joy of Christians, are here put in mind of their business. Here we have,

I. Comfortable words directed to God's people in general, v. 1. The prophets have instructions from their God (for he is the *Lord God of the holy prophets*, Rev. xxii. 6) to comfort the people of God ; and the charge is doubled, *Comfort you, comfort you*—not because the prophets are unwilling to do it (no, it is the most pleasant part of their work), but because sometimes the souls of God's people refuse to be comforted, and their comforters must repeat things again and again, ere they can fasten any thing upon them. Observe here, 1. There are a people in the world that are God's people. 2. It is the will of God that his people should be a comforted people, even in the worst of times. 3. It is the work and business of ministers to do what they can for the comfort of God's people. 4. Words of conviction, such as we had in the former part of this book, must be followed with words of comfort, such as we have here ; for he that has torn will heal us.

II. Comfortable words directed to Jerusalem in particular : "Speak to the heart of Jerusalem (v. 2) ; speak that which will revive her heart, and be a cordial to her and

to all that belong to her and wish her well. Do not whisper it, but cry unto her: cry aloud, to show saints their comforts as well as to show sinners their transgressions; make her hear it." 1. "That the days of her trouble are numbered and finished: *Her warfare is accomplished*, the set time of her servitude; the campaign is now at an end, and she shall retire into quarters of refreshment." Human life is a warfare (Job vii. 1); the Christian life much more. But the struggle will not last always; the warfare will be accomplished, and then the good soldiers shall not only enter into rest, but be sure of their pay. 2. "That the cause of her trouble is removed, and, when that is taken away, the effect will cease. Tell her that *her iniquity is pardoned*, God is reconciled to her, and she shall no longer be treated as one guilty before him." Nothing can be spoken more comfortably than this, *Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee*. Troubles are then removed in love when sin is pardoned. 3. "That the end of her trouble is answered: *She has received of the Lord double for the cure of all her sins*, sufficient, and more than sufficient, to separate between her and her idols," the worship of which was the great sin for which God had a controversy with them, and from which he designed to reclaim them by their captivity in Babylon: and it had that effect upon them; it begat in them a rooted antipathy to idolatry, and was physic doubly strong for the purging out of that iniquity. Or it may be taken as the language of the divine compassion: *His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel* (Judges x. 16), and, like a tender father, *since he spoke against them he earnestly remembered them* (Jer. xxxi. 20), and was ready to say that he had given them too much correction. They, being very penitent, acknowledged that God had *punished them less than their iniquities deserved*; but he, being very pitiful, owned, in a manner, that he had punished them more than they deserved. True penitents have indeed, in Christ and his sufferings, *received of the Lord's hand double for all their sins*; for the satisfaction Christ made by his death was of such an infinite value that it was more than double to the demerits of sin; *for God spared not his own Son*.

3 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: 5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the

LORD hath spoken it. 6 The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: 7 The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the Spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. 8 The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.

The time to favour Zion, yea, the set time, having come, the people of God must be prepared, by repentance and faith, for the favours designed them; and, in order to call them to both these, we have here *the voice of one crying in the wilderness*, which may be applied to those prophets who were with the captives in their wilderness-state, and who, when they saw the day of their deliverance dawn, called earnestly upon them to prepare for it, and assured them that all the difficulties which stood in the way of their deliverance should be got over. It is a good sign that mercy is preparing for us if we find God's grace preparing us for it, Ps. x. 17. But it *must* be applied to John the Baptist; for, though God was the speaker, he was *the voice of one crying in the wilderness*, and his business was to *prepare the way of the Lord*, to dispose men's minds for the reception and entertainment of the gospel of Christ. The way of the Lord is prepared,

1. By repentance for sin; that was it which John Baptist preached to all Judah and Jerusalem (Matt. iii. 2, 5), and thereby *made ready a people prepared for the Lord*, Luke i. 17.

1. The alarm is given; let all take notice of it at their peril; God is coming in a way of mercy, and we must prepare for him, v. 3—5. If we apply it to their captivity, it may be taken as a promise that, whatever difficulties lie in their way, when they return they shall be removed. This voice in the wilderness (divine power going along with it) sets pioneers on work to level the roads. But it may be taken as a call to duty, and it is the same duty that we are called to, in preparation for Christ's entrance into our souls. (1.) We must get into such a frame of spirit as will dispose us to receive Christ and his gospel: "*Prepare you the way of the Lord*; prepare yourselves for him, and let all that be suppressed which would be an obstruction to his entrance. Make room for Christ: *Make straight a highway for him*." If he prepare the end for us, we ought surely to prepare the way for him. Prepare for the Saviour; *lift up your heads, O you gates!* Ps. xxiv. 7, 9. Prepare for the salvation, the great salvation, and other minor deliverances. Let us get to be fit for them, and then God will work them out. Let us not stand in our own light, nor put a bar in our own door but find, or make, a



highway for him, even in that which was desert ground. This is that for which he waits to be gracious. (2.) We must get our hearts levelled by divine grace. Those that are hindered from comfort in Christ by their dejections and despondencies are the valleys that must be exalted. Those that are hindered from comfort in Christ by a proud conceit of their own merit and worth are the mountains and hills that must be made low. Those that have entertained prejudices against the word and ways of God, that are untractable, and disposed to thwart and contradict even that which is plain and easy because it agrees not with their corrupt inclinations and secular interests, are the crooked that must be made straight and the rough places that must be made plain. Let but the gospel of Christ have a fair hearing, and it cannot fail of acceptance. This prepares the way of the Lord; and thus God will by his grace prepare his own way in all the vessels of mercy, whose hearts he opens as he did Lydia's.

2. When this is done *the glory of the Lord shall be revealed*, v. 5. (1.) When the captives are prepared for deliverance Cyrus shall proclaim it, and those shall have the benefit of it, and those only, whose hearts the Lord shall stir up with courage and resolution to break through the discouragements that lay in their way, and to make nothing of the hills, and valleys, and all the rough places. (2.) When John Baptist has for some time preached repentance, mortification, and reformation, and so made ready a people prepared for the Lord (Luke i. 17), then the Messiah himself shall be revealed in his glory, working miracles, which John did not, and by his grace, which is his glory, binding up and healing with consolations those whom John had wounded with convictions. And this revelation of divine glory shall be *a light to lighten the Gentiles. All flesh shall see it together*, and not the Jews only; they shall see and admire it, see it and bid it welcome; as the return out of captivity was taken notice of by the neighbouring nations, Ps. cxxvi. 2. And it shall be the accomplishment of the word of God, not one *iota* or tittle of which shall fall to the ground: *The mouth of the Lord has spoken it*, and therefore the hand of the Lord will effect it.

II. By confidence in the word of the Lord, and not in any creature. *The mouth of the Lord having spoken it*, the voice has this further to cry (he that has ears to hear let him hear it), *The word of our God shall stand for ever*, v. 8.

1. By this accomplishment of the prophecies and promises of salvation, and the performance of them to the utmost in due time, it appears that the word of the Lord is sure and what may be safely relied on. Then we are prepared for deliverance when we depend entirely upon the word of God, build our hopes on that, with an assurance that it will

not make us ashamed: in a dependence upon this word we must be brought to own that *all flesh is grass*, withering and fading. (1.) The power of man, when it does appear against the deliverance, is not to be feared; for it shall be as grass before the word of the Lord: it shall wither and be trodden down. The insulting Babylonians, who promise themselves that the desolations of Jerusalem shall be perpetual, are but as grass which the Spirit of the Lord blows upon, makes nothing of, but blasts all its glory; for the word of the Lord, which promises their deliverance, shall stand for ever, and it is not in the power of their enemies to hinder the execution of it. (2.) The power of man, when it would appear for the deliverance, is not to be trusted to; for it is but as grass in comparison with the word of the Lord, which is the only firm foundation for us to build our hope upon. When God is about to work salvation for his people he will take them off from depending upon creatures, and looking for it from hills and mountains. They shall fail them, and their expectations from them shall be frustrated: *The Spirit of the Lord shall blow upon them*; for God will have no creature to be a rival with him for the hope and confidence of his people; and, as it is his word only that shall stand for ever, so in that word only our faith must stand. When we are brought to this, then, and not till then, we are fit for mercy.

2. The word of our God, that glory of the Lord which is now to be revealed, the gospel, and that grace which is brought with it to us and wrought by it in us, shall stand for ever; and this is the satisfaction of all believers, when they find all their creature-comforts withering and fading like grass. Thus the apostle applies it to *the word which by the gospel is preached unto us, and which lives and abides for ever as the incorruptible seed by which we are born again*, 1 Pet. i. 23—25. To prepare the way of the Lord we must be convinced, (1.) Of the vanity of the creature, that all flesh is grass, weak and withering. We ourselves are so, and therefore cannot save ourselves; all our friends are so, and therefore are unable to save us. All the beauty of the creature, which might render it amiable, is but as the flower of grass, soon blasted, and therefore cannot recommend us to God and to his acceptance. We are dying creatures; all our comforts in this world are dying comforts, and therefore cannot be the felicity of our immortal souls. We must look further for a salvation, look further for a portion. (2.) Of the validity of the promise of God. We must be convinced that the word of the Lord can do that for us which all flesh cannot—that, forasmuch as it stands for ever, it will furnish us with a happiness that will run parallel with the duration of our souls, which must live for ever; for the things that are not seen, but must be believed, are eternal.



9 O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! 10 Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. 11 He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.

It was promised (v. 5) that the glory of the Lord shall be revealed; that is it with the hopes of which God's people must be comforted. Now here we are told,

I. How it shall be revealed, v. 9. 1. It shall be revealed to Zion and Jerusalem; notice shall be given of it to the remnant that are left in Zion and Jerusalem, the poor of the land, who were vine-dressers and husbandmen; it shall be told them that their brethren shall return to them. This shall be told also to the captives who belonged to Zion and Jerusalem, and retained their affection for them. Zion is said to dwell with the daughter of Babylon (Zech. ii. 7); and there she receives notice of Cyrus's gracious proclamation; and so the margin reads it, *O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, &c.*, meaning the persons who were employed in publishing that proclamation; let them do it with a good will, let them make the country ring of it, and let them tell it to the sons of Zion in their own language, saying to them, *Behold your God.* 2. It shall be published by Zion and Jerusalem (so the text reads it); those that remain there, or that have already returned, when they find the deliverance proceeding towards perfection, let them proclaim it in the most public places, whence they may be best heard by all the cities of Judah; let them proclaim it as loudly as they can: let them lift up their voice with strength, and not be afraid of overstraining themselves; let them not be afraid lest the enemy should hear it and quarrel with them, or lest it should not prove true, or not such good tidings as at first it appeared; let them say to the cities of Judah, and all the inhabitants of the country, *Behold your God.* When God is going on with the salvation of his people, let them industriously spread the news among their friends, let them tell them that it is God that has done it; whoever were the instruments, God was the author; it is their God, a God in covenant with them, and he does it as theirs, and they will reap the benefit and comfort of it. "Behold him, take

notice of his hand in it, and look above second causes; behold, the God you have long looked for has come at last (ch. xxv. 9): *This is our God, we have waited for him.*" This may refer to the invitation which was sent forth from Jerusalem to the cities of Judah, as soon as they had set up an altar, immediately upon their return out of captivity, to come and join with them in their sacrifices, Ezra iii. 2—4. "When the worship of God is set up again, send notice of it to all your brethren, that they may share with you in the comfort of it." But this was to have its full accomplishment in the apostles' public and undaunted preaching of the gospel to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. The voice crying in the wilderness gave notice that he was coming; but now notice is given that he has come. *Behold the Lamb of God;* take a full view of your Redeemer. Behold your King, behold your God.

II. What that glory is which shall be revealed. "Your God will come, will show himself."

1. "With the power and greatness of a prince (v. 10): *He will come with strong hand*, too strong to be obstructed, though it may be opposed. His strong hand shall subdue his people to himself, and shall restrain and conquer his and their enemies. He will come who is strong enough to break through all the difficulties that lie in his way." Our Lord Jesus was full of power, a mighty Saviour. Some read it, *He will come against the mighty one*, and overpower him, overcome him. Satan is the strong man armed; but our Lord Jesus is stronger than he, and he shall make it to appear that he is so, for, (1.) He shall reign in defiance of all opposition: *His arm shall rule*, shall overrule for him, for the fulfilling of his counsels, to his own glory; for he is his own end. (2.) He shall recompense to all according to their works, as a righteous Judge: *His reward is with him*; he brings along with him, as a returning prince, punishments for the rebels and preferments for his loyal subjects. (3.) He shall proceed and accomplish his purpose: *His work is before him*, that is, he knows perfectly well what he has to do, which way to go about it, and how to compass it. *He himself knows what he will do.*

2. "With the pity and tenderness of a shepherd," v. 11. God is the *Shepherd of Israel* (Ps. lxxx. 1); Christ is the good Shepherd, John x. 11. The same that rules with the strong hand of a prince leads and feeds with the kind hand of a shepherd. (1.) He takes care of all his flock, the little flock: *He shall feed his flock like a shepherd.* His word is food for his flock to feed on; his ordinances are fields for them to feed in; his ministers are under-shepherds that are appointed to attend them. (2.) He takes particular care of those that most need his care,



the lambs that are weak, and cannot help themselves, and are unaccustomed to hardship, and *those that are with young*, that are therefore heavy, and, if any harm be done them, are in danger of casting their young. He particularly takes care for a succession, that it may not fail or be cut off. The good Shepherd has a tender care for children that are towardly and hopeful, for young converts, that are setting out in the way to heaven, for weak believers, and those that are of a sorrowful spirit. These are the lambs of his flock, that shall be sure to want nothing that their case requires. [1.] He will gather them in the arms of his power; his strength shall be made *perfect in their weakness*, 2 Cor. xii. 9. He will gather them in when they wander, gather them up when they fall, gather them together when they are dispersed, and gather them home to himself at last; and all this with his own arm, out of which none shall be able to pluck them, John x. 28. [2.] He will carry them in the bosom of his love and cherish them there. When they tire or are weary, are sick and faint, when they meet with foul ways, he will carry them on, and take care they be not left behind. [3.] He will gently lead them. By his word he requires no more service, and by his providence he inflicts no more trouble, than he will fit them for; for he considers their frame.

12 Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with a span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? 13 Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or *being* his counsellor hath taught him? 14 With whom took he counsel, and *who* instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and showed to him the way of understanding? 15 Behold, the nations *are* as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. 16 And Lebanon *is* not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt-offering. 17 All nations before him *are* as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.

The scope of these verses is to show what a great and glorious being the Lord Jehovah is, who is Israel's God and Saviour. It comes in here, 1. To encourage his people that were captives in Babylon to hope in him, and to depend upon him for deliver-

ance, though they were ever so weak and their oppressors ever so strong. 2. To engage them to cleave to him, and not to turn aside after other gods; for there are none to be compared with him. 3. To possess all those who receive the glad tidings of redemption by Christ with a holy awe and reverence of God. Though it was said (v. 9), *Behold your God*, and (v. 11) *He shall feed his flock like a shepherd*, yet these condescensions of his grace must not be thought of with any diminution to the transcendencies of his glory. Let us see how great our God is, and fear before him; for,

I. His power is unlimited, and what no creature can compare with, much less contend with, v. 12. 1. He has a vast reach. View the celestial globe, and you are astonished at the extent of it; but the great God *metes the heavens with a span*; to him they are but a hand-breadth, so large-handed is he. View the terraqueous globe, and he has the command of that too. All the waters in the world he can *measure in the hollow of his hand*, where we can hold but a little water; and the dry land he easily manages, for he *comprehends the dust of the earth in a measure*, or with his three fingers; it is no more to him than a *pugil*, or that which we take up between our thumb and two fingers. 2. He has a vast strength, and can as easily move mountains and hills as the tradesman heaves his goods into the scales and out of them again; he poises them with his hand as exactly as if he weighed them in a pair of balances. This may refer to the work of creation, when the heavens were stretched out as exactly as that which is spanned, and the earth and waters were put together in just proportions, as if they had been measured, and the mountains made of such a weight as to serve for ballast to the globe, and no more. Or it may refer to the work of providence (which is a continued creation) and the consistency of all the creatures with each other.

II. His wisdom is unsearchable, and what no creature can give either information or direction to, v. 13, 14. As none can do what God has done and does, so none can assist him in the doing of it or suggest any thing to him which he thought not of. When the Lord by his Spirit made the world (Job xxvi. 13) there was none that directed his Spirit, or gave him any advice, either what to do or how to do it. Nor does he need any counsellor to direct him in the government of the world, nor is there any with whom he consults, as the wisest kings do with those that *know law and judgment*, Esther i. 13. God needs not to be told what is done, for he knows it perfectly; nor needs he be advised concerning what is to be done, for he knows both the right end and the proper means. This is much insisted upon here, because the poor captives had no politicians among them to manage their concerns at

court or to put them in a way of gaining their liberty. "No matter," says the prophet; "you have a God to act for you, who needs not the assistance of statesmen." In the great work of our redemption by Christ matters were concerted *before the world was*, when there was none to *teach God in the path of judgment*, 1 Cor. ii. 7.

III. The nations of the world are nothing in comparison of him, v. 15, 17. Take them all together, all the great and mighty nations of the earth, kings the most pompous, kingdoms the most populous, both the most wealthy; take the isles, the multitude of them, the isles of the Gentiles: *Before him*, when they stand in competition with him or in opposition to him, they are *as a drop of the bucket* compared with the vast ocean, or *the small dust of the balance* (which does not serve to turn it, and therefore is not regarded, it is so small) in comparison with all the dust of the earth. *He takes them up*, and throws them away from him, *as a very little thing*, not worth speaking of. They are all in his eye *as nothing*, as if they had no being at all; for they add nothing to his perfection and all-sufficiency. *They are counted by him*, and are to be counted by us in comparison of him, *less than nothing, and vanity*. When he pleases, he can as easily bring them all into nothing as at first he brought them out of nothing. When God has work to do he values not either the assistance or the resistance of any creature. They are all *vanity*; the word that is used for the chaos (Gen. i. 2), to which they will at last be reduced. Let this beget in us high thoughts of God and low thoughts of this world, and engage us to make God, and not man, both our fear and our hope. This magnifies God's love to the world, that, though it is of such small account and value with him, yet, for the redemption of it, he gave his only-begotten Son, John iii. 16.

IV. The services of the church can make no addition to him nor do they bear any proportion to his infinite perfections (v. 16): *Lebanon is not sufficient to burn*; not the wood of it, to be for the fuel of the altar, though it be so well stocked with cedars; not the beasts of it, to be for sacrifices, though it be so well stocked with cattle, v. 16. Whatever we honour God with, it falls infinitely short of the merit of his perfection; for he is exalted *far above all blessing and praise*, all burnt-offerings and sacrifices.

18 To whom then will ye liken God? Or what likeness will ye compare unto him? 19 The workman melteth a graven image, and the goldsmith spreadeth it over with gold, and casteth silver chains. 20 He that *is* so impoverished that he hath no oblation, chooseth a tree *that* will not rot; he seeketh unto him a cun-

ning workman to prepare a graven image, *that* shall not be moved. 21 Have ye not known? Have ye not heard? Hath it not been told you from the beginning? Have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth? 22 *It is* he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof *are* as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in: 23 That bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity. 24 Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown: yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth: and he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble. 25 To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. 26 Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these *things*, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that *he is* strong in power; not one faileth.

The prophet here reproves those, 1. Who represented God by creatures, and so changed his truth into a lie and his glory into shame, who made images and then said that they resembled God, and paid their homage to them accordingly. 2. Who put creatures in the place of God, who feared them more than God, as if they were a match for him, or loved them more than God, as if they were fit to be rivals with him. Twice the challenge is here made, *To whom will you liken God?* v. 18, and again v. 25. The Holy One himself says, *To whom will you liken me?* This shows the folly and absurdity, (1.) Of corporal idolatry, making visible images of him who is invisible, imagining the image to be animated by the deity, and the deity to be presented by the image, which, as it was an instance of the corruption of the human nature, so it was an intolerable injury to the honour of the divine nature. (2.) Of spiritual idolatry, making creatures equal with God in our affections. Proud people make themselves equal with God; covetous people make their money equal with God; and whatever we esteem or love, fear or hope in, more than God, that creature we equal with God, which is the highest affront imaginable to him who is *God over all*. Now to show the absurdity of this,

I. The prophet describes idols as despi-



cable things, and worthy of the greatest contempt (v. 19, 20): "Look upon the better sort of them, which rich people set up, and worship; they are made of some base metal, cast into what shape the founder pleases, and that is gilded, or overlaid with plates of gold, that it may pass for a golden image. It is a creature; for the workman made it; *therefore it is not God*, Hos. viii. 6. It depended upon his will whether it should be a god at all, and of what shape it should be. It is a cheat; for it is gold on the outside, but within it is lead or copper, in this indeed representing the deities, that they were not what they seemed to be, and deceived their admirers. How despicable then are the worst sort of them—the poor men's gods! *He that is so impoverished* that he has scarcely a sacrifice to offer to his god when he has made him will yet not be without an enshrined deity of his own; and, though he cannot procure one of brass or stone, he will have a wooden one rather than none, and for that purpose *chooses a tree that will not soon rot*, and of that he will have his graven image made. Both agree to have their image well fastened, that they may not be robbed of it. The better sort have silver chains to fix theirs with; and, though it be but a wooden image, care is taken that it *shall not be moved*." Let us pause a little and see, 1. How these idolaters shame themselves, and what a reproach they put upon their own reason, in dreaming that gods of their own making (*Nehushtans*, pieces of brass or logs of wood) should be able to do them any kindness. Thus vain were they in their imaginations; and how was their foolish heart darkened! 2. See how these idolaters shame us, who worship the only living and true God. They spared no cost upon their idols; we grudge that as waste which is spent in the service of our God. They took care that their idols should not be moved; we wilfully provoke our God to depart from us.

II. He describes God as infinitely great, and worthy of the highest veneration; so that between him and idols, whatever competition there may be, there is no comparison. To prove the greatness of God he appeals,

1. To what they had *heard of him by the hearing of the ear*, and the consent of all ages and nations concerning him (v. 21): "*Have you not known by the very light of nature? Has it not been told you by your fathers and teachers*, according to the constant tradition received from their ancestors and predecessors, even from the beginning?" (Those notices of God are as ancient as the world.) "*Have you not understood it as always acknowledged from the foundation of the earth*, that God is a great God, and a great King above all gods?" It has been a truth universally admitted that there is an infinite Being who is the fountain of all

being. This is understood not only ever since the beginning of the world, but from and by the origin of the universe. It is founded upon the foundation of the earth. The invisible things of God are *clearly seen from the creation of the world*, Rom. i. 20. Thou mayest not only ask thy father, and he shall tell thee this, and thy elders (Deut. xxxii. 7); but *ask those that go by the way* (Job xxi. 29), ask the first man you meet, and he will say the same. Some read it, *Will you not know? Will you not hear?* For those that are ignorant of this are willingly ignorant; the light shines in their faces, but they shut their eyes against it. Now that which is here said of God is, (1.) That he has the command of all the creatures. The heaven and the earth themselves are under his management: *He sits upon the circle, or globe, of the earth*, v. 22. He that has the special residence of his glory in the upper world maintains a dominion over this lower world, gives law to it, and directs all the motions of it to his own glory. He sits undisturbed upon the earth, and so establishes it. He is still stretching out the heavens, his power and providence keep them still stretched out, and will do so till the day comes that they shall be rolled together like a scroll. He spreads them out as easily as we draw a curtain to and fro, opening these curtains in the morning and drawing them close again at night. And the heaven is to this earth *as a tent to dwell in*; it is a canopy drawn over our heads, *et quod tegit omnia celum—and it encircles all*.—Ovid. See Ps. civ. 2. (2.) That the children of men, even the greatest and mightiest, are as nothing before him. The numerous inhabitants of this earth are in his eye as grasshoppers in ours, so little and inconsiderable, of such small value, of such little use, and so easily crushed. Proud men's lifting up themselves is but like the grasshopper's leap; in an instant they must stoop down to the earth again. If the spies thought themselves grasshoppers before the sons of Anak (Num. xiii. 33), what are we before the great God? Grasshoppers live but awhile, and live carelessly, not like the ant; so do the most of men. (3.) That those who appear and act against him, how formidable soever they may be to their fellow-creatures, will certainly be humbled and brought down by the mighty hand of God, v. 23, 24. Princes and judges, who have great authority, and abuse it to the support of oppression and injustice, make nothing of those about them; *as for all their enemies they puff at them* (Ps. x. 5; xii. 5); but, when the great God takes them to task, he brings them to nothing; he humbles them, and tames them, and makes them as vanity, little regarded, neither feared nor loved. He makes them utterly unable to stand before his judgments, which shall either, [1] Prevent their settlement in their authority: *They*



shall not be planted; they shall not be sown; and those are the two ways of propagating plants, either by seed or slips. Nay, if they should gain a little interest, and so be planted or sown, yet *their stock shall not take root in the earth, they shall not continue long in power.* Eliphaz saw the foolish taking root, but *suddenly cursed their habitation.* And then how soon is the fig-tree withered away! Or, [2.] He will blast them when they think they are settled. He does but *blow upon them, and then they shall wither, and come to nothing, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble.* For God's wrath, though it seem at first to blow slightly upon them, will soon become a mighty whirlwind. When God judges he will overcome. Those that will not bow before him cannot stand before him.

2. He appeals to what *their eyes saw of him* (v. 26): "*Lift up your eyes on high; be not always poring on this earth*" (*O curvæ in terras animæ et cœlestium inanes!—Degenerate minds, that can bend so towards the earth, having nothing celestial in them!*), "*but sometimes look up*" (*Os homini sublime dedit, cœlumque tueri jussit—Heaven gave to man an erect countenance, and bade him gaze on the stars*); "*behold the glorious lights of heaven, consider who has created them.* They neither made nor marshalled themselves; doubtless, therefore, there is a God that gave them their being, power, and motion." What we see of the creature should lead us to the Creator. The idolaters, when they lifted up their eyes and beheld the hosts of heaven, being wholly immersed in sense, looked no further, but worshipped them, Deut. iv. 19; Job xxxi. 26. Therefore the prophet here directs us to make use of our reason as well as our senses, and to consider who created them, and to pay our homage to him. Give him the glory of his sovereignty over them—*He brings out their host by number, as a general draws out the squadrons and battalions of his army; of the knowledge he has of them—He calls them all by names, proper names, according as their place and influence are* (Ps. cxlvii. 4); and of the use he makes of them; when he calls them out to any service, so obsequious are they that, *by the greatness of his might, not one of them fails*, but, as when *the stars in their courses fought against Sisera*, every one does that to which he is appointed. To make these creatures therefore rivals with God, which are such ready servants to him, is an injury to them as well as an affront to him.

27 Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God? 28 Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, *that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator*

of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? *There is no searching of his understanding.* 29 He giveth power to the faint; and to *them that have no might, he increaseth strength.* 30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: 31 But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew *their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.*

Here, I. The prophet reproves the people of God, who are now supposed to be captives in Babylon for their unbelief and distrust of God, and the dejections and despondencies of their spirit under their affliction (v. 27): "*Whysayest thou, O Jacob! to thyself and to those about thee, My way is hidden from the Lord? Why dost thou make hard and melancholy conclusions concerning thyself and thy present case, as if the latter were desperate?*" 1. The titles he here gives them were enough to shame them out of their distrusts: *O Jacob! O Israel!* Let them remember whence they took these names—from one who had found God faithful to him and kind in all his straits; and why they bore these names—as God's professing people, a people in covenant with him. 2. The way of reproving them is by reasoning with them: "*Why? Consider whether thou hast any ground to say so.*" Many of our foolish frets and foolish fears would vanish before a strict enquiry into the causes of them. 3. That which they are reproved for is an ill-natured, ill-favoured, word they spoke of God, as if he had cast them off. There seems to be an emphasis laid upon their saying it: *Why sayest thou and speakest thou?* It is bad to have evil thoughts rise in our mind, but it is worse to put an *imprimatur*—a sanction to them, and turn them into evil words. David reflects with regret upon what he said in his haste, when he was in distress. 4. The ill word they said was a word of despair concerning their present calamitous condition. They were ready to conclude, (1.) That God would not heed them: "*My way is hidden from the Lord,*" he takes no notice of our straits, nor concerns himself any more in our concerns. There are such difficulties in our case that even divine wisdom and power will be non-plussed." A man *whose way is hidden* is one whom God has hedged in, Job iii. 23. (2.) That God could not help them: "*My judgment is passed over from my God; my case is past relief, so far past it that God himself cannot redress the grievances of it. Our bones are dried.*" Ezek. xxxvii. 11.

II. He reminds them of that which, if duly considered, was sufficient to silence all



those fears and distracts. For their conviction, as before for the conviction of idolaters (v. 21), he appeals to what they had known and what they had heard. Jacob and Israel were a knowing people, or might have been, and their knowledge came by hearing; for Wisdom cried in their chief places of concourse. Now, among other things, they had heard that *God had spoken once, twice, yea, many a time they had heard it, That power belongs unto God* (Ps. lxi. 11), 'That is,

1. He is himself an almighty God. He must needs be so, for he is the *everlasting God, even Jehovah*. He was from eternity; he will be to eternity; and therefore with him there is no deficiency, no decay. He has his being of himself, and therefore all his perfections must needs be boundless. He is without beginning of days or end of life, and therefore with him there is no change. He is also the *Creator of the ends of the earth*, that is, of the whole earth and all that is in it from end to end. He therefore is the rightful owner and ruler of all, and must be concluded to have an absolute power over all and an all-sufficiency to help his people in their greatest straits. Doubtless he is still as able to save his church as he was at first to make the world. (1.) He has wisdom to contrive the salvation, and that wisdom is never at a loss: *There is no searching out of his understanding*, so as to countermin the counsels of it and defeat its intentions; no, nor so as to determine what he will do, for he has ways by himself, ways in the sea. None can say, "Thus far God's wisdom can go, and no further;" for, when we know not what to do, he knows. (2.) He has power to bring about the salvation, and that power is never exhausted: *He faints not, nor is weary*; he upholds the whole creation, and governs all the creatures, and is neither tired nor toiled; and therefore, no doubt, he has power to relieve his church, when it is brought ever so low, without weakness or weariness.

2. He gives strength and power to his people, and helps them by enabling them to help themselves. He that is the strong God is the strength of Israel. (1.) He can help the weak, v. 29. Many a time *he gives power to the faint*, to those that are ready to faint away; and *to those that have no might* he not only gives, but *increases strength*, as there is more and more occasion for it. Many out of bodily weakness are wonderfully recovered, and made strong, by the providence of God: and many that are feeble in spirit, timorous and faint-hearted, unfit for services and sufferings, are yet strengthened by the grace of God *with all might in the inward man*. To those who are sensible of their weakness, and ready to acknowledge they have no might, God does in a special manner increase strength; for, *when we are weak in ourselves, then are we strong in the Lord*. (2.) He will help the willing, will help those who, in a humble dependence

upon him, help themselves, and will do well for those who do their best, v. 30, 31. Those who trust to their own sufficiency, and are so confident of it that they neither exert themselves to the utmost nor seek unto God for his grace, are *the youths and the young men*, who are strong, but are apt to think themselves stronger than they are. And *they shall faint and be weary, yea, they shall utterly fail* in their services, in their conflicts, and under their burdens; they shall soon be made to see the folly of trusting to themselves. *But those that wait on the Lord*, who make conscience of their duty to him, and by faith rely upon him and commit themselves to his guidance, shall find that God will not fail them. [1.] They shall have grace sufficient for them: *They shall renew their strength* as their work is renewed, as there is new occasion; they shall be anointed, and their lamps supplied, with fresh oil. God will be their *arm every morning*, ch. xxxiii. 2. If at any time they have been foiled and weakened they shall recover themselves, and so renew their strength. Heb. *They shall change their strength*, as their work is changed—doing work, suffering work; they shall have strength to labour, strength to wrestle, strength to resist, strength to bear. As the day so shall the strength be. [2.] They shall use this grace for the best purposes. Being strengthened, *First*, They shall soar upward, upward towards God: *They shall mount up with wings like eagles*, so strongly, so swiftly, so high and heaven-ward. In the strength of divine grace, their souls shall ascend above the world, and even enter into the holiest. Pious and devout affections are the eagles' wings on which gracious souls mount up, Ps. xxv. 1. *Secondly*, They shall press forward, forward towards heaven. They shall walk, they shall run, the way of God's commandments, cheerfully and with alacrity (*they shall not be weary*), constantly and with perseverance (*they shall not faint*); and therefore in due season they shall reap. Let Jacob and Israel therefore, in their greatest distresses, continue waiting upon God, and not despair of timely and effectual relief and succour from him.

## CHAP. XLI.

This chapter, as the former, is intended both for the conviction of idolaters and for the consolation of all God's faithful worshippers; for the Spirit is sent, and ministers are employed by him, both to convince and to comfort. And however this might be primarily intended for the conviction of Babylonians, and the comfort of Israelites, or for the conviction of those in Israel that were addicted to idolatry, as multitudes were, and the comfort of those that kept their integrity, doubtless it was intended both for admonition and encouragement to us, admonition to keep ourselves from idols and encouragement to trust in God. Here, I. God by the prophet shows the folly of those that worshipped idols, especially that thought their idols able to contest with him and control him, ver. 1-9. II. He encourages his faithful ones to trust in him, with an assurance that he would take their part against their enemies, make them victorious over them, and bring about a happy change of their affairs, ver. 10-20. III. He challenges the idols, that were rivals with him for men's adoration, to vie with him either for knowledge or power, either to show things to come or to do good or evil, ver. 21-25. So that the chapter may be summed up in those words of Eljah, "If Jehovah be God, then follow him; but, if Baal be God, then follow him;" and in the

people's acknowledgment, upon the issue of the trial, "Jehovah he is the God, Jehovah he is the God."

**K**EEP silence before me, O islands; and let the people renew their strength: let them come near; then let them speak: let us come near together to judgment. 2 Who raised up the righteous man from the east, called him to his foot, gave the nations before him, and made him rule over kings? He gave them as the dust to his sword, and as driven stubble to his bow. 3 He pursued them, and passed safely; even by the way that he had not gone with his feet. 4 Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he. 5 The isles saw it, and feared; the ends of the earth were afraid, drew near, and came. 6 They helped every one his neighbour; and every one said to his brother, Be of good courage. 7 So the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith, and he that smootheneth with the hammer him that smote the anvil, saying, It is ready for the soldering: and he fastened it with nails, that it should not be moved. 8 But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend. 9 Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away.

That particular instance of God's care for his people Israel in raising up Cyrus to be their deliverer is here insisted upon as a great proof both of his sovereignty above all idols and of his power to protect his people. Here is,

I. A general challenge to the worshippers and admirers of idols to make good their pretensions, in competition with God and opposition to him, *v. 1*. It is renewed (*v. 21*): *Produce your cause*. The court is set, summonses are sent to the islands that lay most remote, but not out of God's jurisdiction, for he is the *Creator and possessor of the ends of the earth*, to make their appearance and give their attendance. Silence (as usual) is proclaimed while the cause is in trying: "*Keep silence before me, and judge nothing before the time;*" while the cause is in trying between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan it becomes all people silently to expect the issue, not to object

against God's proceedings, but to be confident that he will carry the day. The defenders of idolatry are called to say what they can in defence of it: "*Let them renew their strength*, in opposition to God, and see whether it be equal to the strength which those renew that wait upon him (*ch. xl. 31*); let them try their utmost efforts, whether by force of arms or force of argument. *Let them come near*; they shall not complain that God's dread makes them afraid (*Job xiii. 21*), so that they cannot say what they have to say, in vindication and honour of their idols; no, *let them speak freely*: *Let us come near together to judgment*." Note, 1. The cause of God and his kingdom is not afraid of a fair trial; if the case be but fairly stated, it will be surely carried in favour of religion. 2. The enemies of God's church and his holy religion may safely be challenged to say and do their worst for the support of their unrighteous cause. He that *sits in heaven laughs at them*, and the daughter of Zion despises them; for great is the truth and will prevail.

II. He particularly challenges the idols to do that for their worshippers, and against his, which he had done and would do for his worshippers, and against theirs. Different senses are given of *v. 2*, concerning the *righteous man raised up from the east*; and, since we cannot determine which is the true, we will make use of each as good.

1. That which is to be proved is, (1.) That the Lord is God alone, the first and with the last (*v. 4*), that he is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, that he governed the world from the beginning, and will to the end of time. He has reigned of old, and will reign for ever; the counsels of his kingdom were from eternity, and the continuance of it will be to eternity. (2.) That Israel is his servant (*v. 8*), whom he owns, and protects, and employs, and in whom he is and will be glorified. As there is a God in heaven, so there is a church on earth that is his particular care. Elijah prays (*1 Kings xviii. 36*), *Let it be known that thou art God, and that I am thy servant*. Now,

2. To prove this he shows,

(1.) That it was he who called Abraham, the father of this despised nation, out of an idolatrous country, and by many instances of his favour made his name great, *Gen. xii. 2*. He is the *righteous man whom God raised up from the east*. Of him the Chaldee paraphrast expressly understands it: *Who brought Abraham publicly from the east?* To maintain the honour of the people of Israel, it was very proper to show what a figure this great ancestor of theirs made in his day; and *v. 8* seems to be the explication of it, where God calls Israel the *seed of Abraham my friend*; and (*v. 4*) he calls the generations (namely, the generations of Israel) *from the beginning*. Also, to put contempt upon idolatry, and particularly the Chaldean idolatry,



it was proper to show how Abraham was called from serving other gods (Josh. xxiv. 2, 3, &c.), so that an early testimony was borne against that idolatry which boasted so much of its antiquity. Also, to encourage the captives in Babylon to hope that God would find a way for their return to their own land, it was proper to remind them how at first he brought their father Abraham out of the same country into this land, to give it to him for an inheritance, Gen. xv. 7. Now observe what is here said concerning him.

[1.] That he was a *righteous man*, or *righteousness*, a man of *righteousness*, that believed God, and it was counted to him for *righteousness*; and so he became the father of all those who by faith in Christ are made the *righteousness of God through him*, Rom. iv. 3, 11; 2 Cor. v. 21. He was a great example of righteousness in his day, and taught his household to do judgment and justice, Gen. xviii. 19. [2.] That God raised him up from the east, from Ur first and afterwards from Haran, which lay east from Canaan. God would not let him settle in either of those places, but did by him as the eagle by her young, when she stirs up her nest: he raised him out of iniquity and made him pious, out of obscurity and made him famous.

[3.] He called him to his foot, to follow him with an implicit faith; for he went out, not knowing whither he went, but whom he followed, Heb. xi. 8. Those whom God effectually calls he calls to his foot, to be subject to him, to attend him, and follow the Lamb whithersoever he goes; and we must all either come to his foot or be made his footstool. [4.] He gave nations before him, the nations of Canaan, which he promised to make him master of, and thus far gave him an interest in that the Hittites acknowledged him a mighty prince among them, Gen. xxiii. 6. He made him rule over those kings whom he conquered for the rescue of his brother Lot, Gen. xiv. And when God gave them as dust to his sword, and as driven stubble to his bow (that is, made them an easy prey to his catechised servants), he then pursued them, and passed safely, or in peace, under the divine protection, though it was in a way he was altogether unacquainted with; and so considerable was this victory that Melchizedec himself appeared to celebrate it. Now who did this but the great Jehovah? Can any of the gods of the heathen do so?

(2.) That it is he who will, ere long, raise up Cyrus from the east. It is spoken of according to the language of prophecy as a thing past, because as sure to be done in its season as if it were already done. God will raise him up in righteousness (so it may be read, ch. xlv. 13), will call him to his foot, make what use of him he pleases, and make him victorious over the nations that oppose his coming to the crown, and give him success in all his wars; and he shall be a type of

Christ, who is righteousness itself, the Lord our righteousness, whom God will, in the fulness of time, raise up and make victorious over the powers of darkness; so that he shall spoil them and make a show of them openly.

III. He exposes the folly of idolaters, who, notwithstanding the convincing proofs which the God of Israel had given of his being God alone, obstinately persisted in their idolatry, nay, were so much the more hardened in it (v. 5): *The isles of the Gentiles saw this*, not only what God did for Abraham himself, but what he did for his seed, for his sake, how he brought them out of Egypt, and made them rule over kings, and they feared, Exod. xv. 14—16. They were afraid, and, according to the summons (v. 1), they drew near, and came; they could not avoid taking notice of what God did for Abraham and his seed; but, instead of helping to reason one another out of their sottish idolatries, they helped to confirm one another in them, v. 6, 7. 1. They looked upon it as a dangerous design upon their religion, which they were jealous for the honour of, and were resolved, right or wrong, to adhere to, and therefore were alarmed to appear vigorously for the support of it, as the Ephesians for their Diana. When God, by his wonderful appearances on the behalf of his people, went about to wrest their idols from them, they held them so much the faster, and said one to another, "*Be of good courage*"; let us unanimously agree to keep up the reputation of our gods. Though Dagon fall before the ark, he shall be set up again in his place." One tradesman encourages another to come into a confederacy for the keeping up of the noble craft of god-making. Thus men's convictions often exasperate their corruptions, and they are made worse both by the word and the works of God, which should make them better. 2. They looked upon it as a dangerous design upon themselves. They thought themselves in danger from the growing greatness both of Abraham that was a convert from idolatry, and of the people of Israel that were separatists from it; and therefore they not only had recourse to their old gods for protection, but made new ones, Deut. xxxii. 17. *So the carpenter*, having done his part to the timber-work, encouraged the goldsmith to do his part in gilding or overlaying it; and, when it came into the goldsmith's hand, he that smooths with the hammer, that polishes it, or beats it thin, quickened him that smote the anvil, bade him be expeditious, and told him it was ready for the soldering, which perhaps was the last operation about it, and then it is fastened with nails, and you have a god of it presently. Do sinners thus animate and quicken one another in the ways of sin? And shall not the servants of the living God both stir up one another to, and strengthen one another in, his service? Some read all this ironically, and by way of permission: *Let*

them help every one his neighbour; let the carpenter encourage the goldsmith: but all in vain; idols shall fall for all this.

IV. He encourages his own people to trust in him (v. 8, 9): "*But thou, Israel, art my servant.* They know me not, but thou knowest me, and knowest better than to join with such ignorant besotted people as these" (for it is intended for a warning to the people of God not to walk in the way of the heathen); "they put themselves under the protection of these impotent deities, but thou art under my protection. *Those that make them are like unto them, and so is every one that trusts in them; but thou, O Israel! art the servant of a better Master.*" Observe what is suggested here for the encouragement of God's people when they are threatened and insulted over. 1. They are God's servants, and he will not see them abused, especially for what they do in his service: *Thou art my servant* (v. 8), and (v. 9) "*I have said unto thee, Thou art my servant; and I will not go back from my word.*" 2. He has chosen them to be a peculiar people to himself. They were not forced upon him, but of his own good-will he set them apart. 3. They were the seed of Abraham his friend. It was the honour of Abraham that he was called the friend of God (James ii. 23), whom God covenanted and conversed with as a friend, and the man of his counsel; and this honour have all the saints, John xv. 15. And for the father's sake the people of Israel were beloved. God was pleased to look upon them as the posterity of an old friend of his, and therefore to be kind to them; for the covenant of friendship was made with Abraham and his seed. 4. He had sometimes, when they had been scattered among the heathen, fetched them from the ends of the earth and taken them out of the hands of the chief ones thereof, and therefore he would not now abandon them. Abraham their father was fetched from a place at a great distance, and they in his loins; and those who had been thus far-fetched and dear-bought he could not easily part with. 5. He had not yet cast them away, though they had often provoked him, and therefore he would not now abandon them. What God has done for his people, and what he has further engaged to do, should encourage them to trust in him at all times.

10 Fear thou not; for I *am* with thee: be not dismayed; for I *am* thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. 11 Behold, all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish. 12 Thou

shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, *even* them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought. 13 For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee. 14 Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the LORD, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. 15 Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff. 16 Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in the LORD, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel. 17 When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the LORD will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. 18 I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. 19 I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah-tree, and the myrtle, and the oil-tree; I will set in the desert the fir-tree, and the pine, and the box-tree together: 20 That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the LORD hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it.

The scope of these verses is to silence the fears, and encourage the faith, of the servants of God in their distresses. Perhaps it is intended, in the first place, for the support of God's Israel, in captivity; but all that faithfully serve God through patience and comfort of this scripture may have hope. And it is addressed to Israel as a single person, that it might the more easily and readily be accommodated and applied by every Israelite indeed to himself. That is a word of caution, counsel, and comfort, which is so often repeated, *Fear thou not*; and again (v. 13), *Fear not*; and (v. 14), "*Fear not, thou worm Jacob*; fear not the threatenings of the enemy, doubt not the promises of thy God; fear not that thou shalt perish in thy affliction or that the promise of thy deliverance shall fail." It is against the mind of God that his people



should be a timorous people. For the suppressing of fear he assures them,

I. That they may depend upon his presence with them as their God, and a God all-sufficient for them in the worst of times. Observe with what tenderness God speaks, and how willing he is to let the heirs of promise know the immutability of his counsel, and how desirous to make them easy: "*Fear thou not, for I am with thee, not only within call, but present with thee; he not dismayed at the power of those that are against thee, for I am thy God, and engaged for thee. Art thou weak? I will strengthen thee. Art thou destitute of friends? I will help thee in the time of need. Art thou ready to sink, ready to fall? I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness, that right hand which is full of righteousness, in dispensing rewards and punishments,*" Ps. xlviii. 10. And again (v. 13) it is promised, 1. That God will strengthen their hands, that is, will help them: "*I will hold thy right hand, go hand in hand with thee*" (so some); he will take us by the hand as our guide, to lead us in our way, will help us up when we are fallen or prevent our falls; when we are weak he will hold us up—wondering, he will fix us—trembling, he will encourage us, and so hold us by the right hand, Ps. lxxiii. 23. 2. That he will silence their fears: *Saying unto thee, Fear not.* He has said it again and again in his word, and has there provided sovereign antidotes against fear: but he will go further; he will by his Spirit say it to their hearts, and make them to hear it, and so will help them.

II. That though their enemies be now very formidable, insolent, and severe, yet the day is coming when God will reckon with them and they shall triumph over them. There are those that are incensed against God's people, that *strive with them* (v. 11), that war against them (v. 12), that hate them, that seek their ruin, and are continually picking quarrels with them. But let not God's people be incensed at them, nor strive with them, nor render evil for evil; but wait God's time, and believe, 1. That they shall be convinced of the folly, at least, if not of the sin of striving with God's people; and, finding it to no purpose, *they shall be ashamed and confounded*, which might bring them to repentance, but will rather fill them with rage. 2. That they shall be quite ruined and undone (v. 11): *They shall be as nothing* before the justice and power of God. When God comes to deal with his proud enemies he makes nothing of them. Or they shall be brought to nothing, shall be as if they had never been. This is repeated (v. 12): *They shall be as nothing and as a thing of nought*, or as that which is gone and has failed. Those that were formidable shall become despicable; those that fancied they could do any

thing shall be able to bring nothing to pass; those that made a figure in the world, and a mighty noise, shall become mere ciphers and be buried in silence. They shall perish, not only be nothing, but be miserable. *Thou shalt seek them, shalt enquire what has become of them, that they do not appear as usual, but thou shalt not find them*, as David, Ps. xxxvii. 36. *I sought him, but he could not be found.*

III. That they themselves should become a terror to those who were now a terror to them, and victory should turn on their side, v. 14—16. See here, 1. How Jacob and Israel are reduced and brought very low. It is the *worm Jacob*, so little, so weak, and so defenceless, despised and trampled on by every body, forced to creep even into the earth for safety; and we must not wonder that Jacob has become a worm, when even Jacob's King calls himself a *worm and no man*, Ps. xxii. 6. God's people are sometimes as worms, in their humble thoughts of themselves and their enemies' haughty thoughts of them—worms, but not vipers, as their enemies are, not of the serpent's seed. God regards Jacob's low estate, and says, "*Fear not, thou worm Jacob*"; fear not that thou shalt be crushed; and *you men of Israel*" (*you few men*, so some read it, *you dead men*, so others) "*do not give yourselves for gone notwithstanding.*" Note, The grace of God will silence fears even when there seems to be the greatest cause for them. *Perplexed but not in despair.* 2. How Jacob and Israel are advanced from this low estate, and made as formidable as ever they have been despicable. But by whom shall Jacob arise, for he is small? We are here told: *I will help thee, saith the Lord*; and it is the honour of God to help the weak. He will help them, for he is their Redeemer, who is wont to redeem them, who has undertaken to do it. Christ is the Redeemer, from him is our help found. He will help them, for he is the *Holy One of Israel*, worshipped among them in the beauty of holiness and engaged by promise to them. The Lord will help them by enabling them to help themselves and making Jacob to become a *threshing instrument*. Observe, He is but an instrument, a tool in God's hand, that he is pleased to make use of; and he is an instrument of God's making and is no more than God makes him. But, if God make him a threshing instrument, he will make use of him, and therefore will make him fit for use, *new and sharp, and having teeth*, or sharp spikes; and then, by divine direction and strength, *thou shalt thresh the mountains*, the highest, and strongest, and most stubborn of thy enemies: *thou shalt not only beat them, but beat them small*; they shall not be as corn threshed out, which is valuable, and is carefully preserved (such God's people are when they are under the flail,



ch. xxi. 10: *O my threshing! yet the corn of my floor, that shall not be lost*; but these are made as *chaff*, which is good for nothing, and which the husbandman is glad to get rid of. He pursues the metaphor, v. 16. Having threshed them, *thou shalt winnow them, and the wind shall scatter them*. This perhaps had its accomplishment, in part, in the victories of the Jews over their enemies in the times of the Maccabees; but it seems in general designed to read the final doom of all the implacable enemies of the church of God, and to have its accomplishment likewise in the triumphs of the cross of Christ, the gospel of Christ, and all the faithful followers of Christ, over the powers of darkness, which, first or last, shall all be dissipated, and in Christ all believers shall be more than conquerors, and *he that overcomes shall have power over the nations*, Rev. ii. 26.

IV. That, hereupon, they shall have abundance of comfort in God, and God shall have abundance of honour from them: *Thou shalt rejoice in the Lord*, v. 16. When we are freed from that which hindered our joy, and are blessed with that which is the matter of it, we ought to remember that God is our exceeding joy and in him all our joys must terminate. When we rejoice over our enemies we must rejoice in the Lord, for to him alone we owe our liberties and victories. "Thou shalt also *glory in the Holy One of Israel*, in thy interest in him and relation to him, and what he has done for thee." And, if thus we make God our praise and glory, we become to him for a praise and a glory.

V. That they shall have seasonable and suitable supplies of every thing that is proper for them in the time of need; and, if there be occasion, God will again do for them as he did for Israel in their march from Egypt to Canaan, v. 17—19. When the captives, either in Babylon or in their return thence, are in distress for want of water or shelter, God will take care of them, and, one way or other, make their journey, even through a wilderness, comfortable to them. But doubtless this promise has more than such a private interpretation. Their return out of Babylon was typical of our redemption by Christ; and so the contents of these promises, 1. Were provided by the gospel of Christ. That glorious discovery of his love has given full assurance to all those who hear this joyful sound that God has provided inestimable comforts for them, sufficient for the supply of all their wants, the balancing of all their griefs, and the answering of all their prayers. 2. They are applied by the grace and Spirit of Christ to all believers, that they may have strong consolation in their way and a complete happiness in their end. Our way to heaven lies through the wilderness of this world. Now, (1.) It is here supposed that the

people of God, in their passage through this world, are often in straits: *The poor and needy seek water, and there is none; the poor in spirit hunger and thirst after righteousness*. The soul of man, finding itself empty and necessitous, seeks for satisfaction somewhere, but soon despairs of finding it in the world, that has nothing in it to make it easy: creatures are *broken cisterns, that can hold no water*; so that *their tongue fails for thirst*, they are weary of seeking that satisfaction in the world which is not to be had in it. Their sorrow makes them thirsty; so does their toil. (2.) It is here promised that, one way or other, all their grievances shall be redressed and they shall be made easy. [1.] God himself will be nigh unto them in all that which they call upon him for. Let all the praying people of God take notice of this, and take comfort of it; he has said, "*I the Lord will hear them, will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them*; I will be with them, as I have always been, in their distresses." While we are in the wilderness of this world this promise is to us what the pillar of cloud and fire was to Israel, an assurance of God's gracious presence. [2.] They shall have a constant supply of fresh water, as Israel had in the wilderness, even where one would least expect it (v. 18): *I will open rivers in high places*, rivers of grace, rivers of pleasure, *rivers of living water*, which he spoke of the Spirit (John vii. 38, 39), that Spirit which should be poured out upon the Gentiles, who had been as high places, dry and barren, and lifted up in their own conceit above the necessity of that gift. And there shall be *fountains in the midst of the valleys*, the valleys of Baca (Ps. lxxxiv. 6), that are sandy and wearisome; or among the Jews, who had been as fruitful valleys in comparison with the Gentile mountains. The preaching of the gospel to the world turned that wilderness into a pool of water, yielding fruit to the owner of it and relief to the travellers through it. [3.] They shall have a pleasant shade to screen them from the scorching heat of the sun, as Israel when they pitched at Elim, where they had not only wells of water, but palm-trees (Exod. xv. 27): "*I will plant in the wilderness the cedar*, v. 19. I will turn the wilderness into an orchard or garden, such as used to be planted with these pleasant trees, so that they shall pass through the wilderness with as much ease and delight as a man walks in his grove. These trees shall be to them what the pillar of cloud was to Israel in the wilderness, a shelter from the heat." Christ and his grace are so to believers, *as the shadow of a great rock*, ch. xxxii. 2. When God sets up his church in the Gentile wilderness there shall be as great a change made by it in men's characters as if thorns and briars were turned into cedars, and fir-trees, and myrtles; and by this a blessed



charge is described, *ch. lv. 13.* [4.] They shall see and acknowledge the hand of God, his power and his favour, in this, *v. 20.* God will do these strange and surprising things on purpose to awaken them to a conviction and consideration of his hand in all: *That they may see this wonderful change, and knowing that it is above the ordinary course and power of nature may consider that therefore it comes from a superior power, and, comparing notes upon it, may understand together, and concur in the acknowledgment of it, that the hand of the Lord, that mighty hand of his which is stretched out for his people and stretched out to them, has done this, and the Holy One of Israel has created it, made it anew, made it out of nothing, made it for the comfort of his people.* Note, God does great things for his people, that he may be taken notice of.

21 Produce your cause, saith the LORD; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob. 22 Let them bring *them* forth, and show us what shall happen: let them show the former things, what they *be*, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare us things for to come. 23 Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye *are* gods: yea, do good, or do evil, that we may be dismayed, and behold *it* together. 24 Behold, ye *are* of nothing, and your work of nought: an abomination *is he* that chooseth you. 25 I have raised up *one* from the north, and he shall come: from the rising of the sun shall he call upon my name: and he shall come upon princes as *upon* mortar, and as the potter treadeth clay. 26 Who hath declared from the beginning, that we may know? and beforetime, that we may say, *He is* righteous? yea, *there is* none that sheweth, yea, *there is* none that declareth, yea, *there is* none that heareth your words. 27 The first *shall say* to Zion, Behold, behold them: and I will give to Jerusalem one that bringeth good tidings. 28 For I beheld, and *there was* no man; even among them, and *there was* no counsellor, that, when I asked of them, could answer a word. 29 Behold, they *are* all vanity; their works *are* nothing: their molten images *are* wind and confusion.

The Lord, by the prophet, here repeats the challenge to idolaters to make out the

pretensions of their idols: "*Produce your cause* (*v. 21*) and make your best of it; *bring forth the strongest reasons* you have to prove that your idols are gods, and worthy of your adoration." Note, There needs no more to show the absurdity of sin than to produce the reasons that are given in defence of it, for they carry with them their own confutation.

1. The idols are here challenged to bring proofs of their knowledge and power. Let us see what they can inform us of, and what they can do. Understanding and active power are the accomplishments of a man. Whoever pretends to be a god must have these in perfection; and have the idols made it to appear that they have? No;

1. "They can tell us nothing that we did not know before, so ignorant are they. We challenge them to inform us," (1.) "What has been formerly: *Let them show the former things*, and raise them out of the oblivion in which they were buried" (God inspired Moses to write such a history of the creation as the gods of the heathen could never have dictated to any of their enthusiasts); or "let the defenders of idols tell us what mighty achievements they can boast of as performed by their gods in former times. What did they ever do that was worth taking notice of? Let them specify any thing, and it shall be considered, its due weight shall be given it, and it shall be compared with the latter end of it; and if, in the issue, it prove to be as great as it pretended to be, they shall have the credit of it." (2.) "We challenge them to tell us what shall happen, to declare to us *things to come* (*v. 22*), and again (*v. 23*), *show the things that are to come hereafter*. Give this evidence of your omniscience, that nothing can be hidden from you, and of your sovereignty and dominion. Make it to appear that you have the doing of all, by letting us know beforehand what you design to do. Do this kindness to the world; let them know what is to come, that they may provide accordingly. Do this, and we will own that you are gods above us, and gods to us, and worthy of our adorations." No creature can foretel things to come, otherwise than by divine information, with any certainty.

2. "They can do nothing that we cannot do ourselves, so impotent are they." He challenges them to do either *good or evil*, good to their friends or evil to their enemies: "Let them do, if they can, any thing extraordinary, that people will admire and be affected with. Let them either bless or curse, with power. Let us see them either inflict such plagues as God brought on Egypt or bestow such blessings as God bestowed on Israel. Let them do some great thing, and we shall be amazed when we see it, and frightened into a veneration of them, as many have been into a veneration of the true God." That which is charged upon

these idols, and let them disprove it if they can, is that *they are of nothing*, v. 24. Their claims have no foundation at all, nor is there any ground or reason in the least for men's paying them the respect they do; there is nothing in them worthy our regard. "They are less than nothing, worse than nothing;" so some read it. "*The work they do is of nought*, and so is the ado that is made about them. There is no pretence or colour for it; it is all a jest; it is all a sham put upon the world; and therefore *he that chooses you*, and so gives you your deity, and" (as some read it) "*that delights in you, is an abomination to God and all wise and good men. He that chooses you chooses an abomination*," so some take it. A servant is at liberty to choose his master, but a man is not at liberty to choose his God. He that chooses any other than the true God chooses an abomination; his choosing it makes it so.

II. He here produces proofs that he is the true God, and that there is none besides him. Let him produce his strong reasons.

1. He has an irresistible power. This he will shortly make to appear in the raising up of Cyrus and making him a type of Christ (v. 25): *He will raise him up from the north and from the rising of the sun*. Cyrus by his father was a Mede, by his mother a Persian; and his army consisted of Medes, whose country lay north, and Persians, whose country lay east, from Babylon. God will raise him up to great power, and he shall come against Babylon with ends of his own to serve. But, (1.) *He shall proclaim God's name*; so it may be read. He shall publish the honour of the God of Israel; so he did remarkably when, in his proclamation for the release of the Jews out of their captivity, he acknowledged that the Lord God of Israel was the Lord God of heaven, and *the God*: and he might be said to call on his name when he encouraged the building of his temple, and very probably did himself call upon him and pray to him, Ezra i. 2, 3. (2.) All opposition shall fall before him: *He shall come upon the princes of Babylon*, and all others that stood in his way, *as mortar*, and trample upon them *as the potter treads clay*, to serve his own purposes with it. Christ, as man, was raised up from the north, for Nazareth lay in the northern parts of Canaan; as the angel of the covenant, he ascends from the east. He maintained the honour of heaven (*he shall call upon my name*), and broke the powers of hell, came upon the prince of darkness as mortar and trod him down.

2. He has an infallible foresight. He would not only do this, but he did now, by his prophet, foretell it. Now the false gods not only could not do it, but they could not foresee it. (1.) He challenges them to produce any of their pretended deities, or their diviners, that had given notice of this, or could (v. 26): "*Who has declared from the*

*beginning* any thing of this kind, or has told it before-time? Tell us if there be any that you know of, for we know not any; if there be any, *we will say, He is righteous*, he is true, his cause is just, his claims are proved, and he is in the right in demanding to be worshipped." This agrees with v. 22, 23. (2.) He challenges to himself the sole honour of doing it and foretelling it (v. 27): *I am the first* (so it may be read) *that will say to Zion, Behold, behold them*, that will let the people of Israel know their deliverers are at hand (for there were those who understood by books, God's books, the approach of the time, Dan. ix. 2), and I am he that *will give to Jerusalem one that brings good tidings*, these good tidings of their enlargement. This is applicable to the work of redemption, in which the Lord showed himself much more than in the release of the Jews out of Babylon: he it was that contrived our salvation, and he brought it about, and he has given to us the glad tidings of reconciliation.

III. Judgment is here given upon this trial. 1. None of all the idols had foretold, or could foresee, this work of wonder. Other nations besides the Jews were released out of captivity in Babylon by Cyrus, or at least were greatly concerned in the revolution of the monarchy and the transferring of it to the Persians; and yet none of them had any intelligence given them of it beforehand, by any of their gods or prophets: "*There is none that shows* (v. 26), *none that declares*, none that gives the least intimation of it; *there is none of the nations that hears your words*, that can pretend to have heard from their gods such words as you, O Israelites! have heard from your God, by your prophets," Ps. cxlvii. 20. None of all the gods of the nations have shown their worshippers the way of salvation, which God will show by the Messiah. The good tidings which the Lord will send in the gospel is a mystery hidden from ages and generations, Rom. xvi. 25, 26. 2. None of those who pleaded for them could produce any instance of their knowledge or power that had in it any colour of proof that they were gods. All their advocates were struck dumb with this challenge (v. 28): "*I beheld, and there was no man that could give evidence for them*, even among those that were their most zealous admirers; *and there was no counsellor*, none that could offer any thing for the support of their cause. Even among the idols themselves there was none fit to give counsel in the most trivial matters, and yet there were those that asked counsel of them in the most important and difficult affairs. When I asked them what they had to say for themselves they stood mute; the case was so plain against them that there was *none who could answer a word*." Judgment must therefore be given against the defendant upon *Nihil dicit*—He



is mute. He has nothing to say for himself. *He was speechless*, Matt. xxii. 12. 3. Sentence is therefore given according to the charge exhibited against them (v. 24): "*Behold, they are all vanity* (v. 29); they are a lie and a cheat; they are not in themselves what they pretend to be, nor will their worshippers find that in them which they promise themselves. *Their works are nothing*, of no force, of no worth; their enemies need fear no hurt from them; their worshippers can hope for no good from them. *Their molten images*, and indeed all their images, are wind and confusion, vanity and vexation; those that worship them will be deceived in them, and will reflect upon their own folly with the greatest bitterness. Therefore, *dearly beloved, flee from idolatry*," 1 Cor. x. 14.

## CHAP. XLII.

The prophet seems here to launch out yet further into the prophecy of the Messiah and his kingdom under the type of Cyrus; and, having the great work of man's salvation by him yet more in view, he almost forgets the occasion that led him into it and drops the return out of Babylon; for indeed the prospect of this would be a greater comfort and support to the believing pious Jews, in their captivity, than the hope of that. And (as Mr. Gataker well observes) in this and similar prophecies of Christ, that are couched in types, as of David and Solomon, some passages agree to the type and not to the truth, others to the truth and not to the type, and many to the type in one sense and the truth in another. Here is, I. A prophecy of the Messiah's coming with meekness, and yet with power, to do the Redeemer's work, ver. 1—4. II. His commission opened, which he received from the Father, ver. 5—9. III. The joy and rejoicing with which the glad tidings of this should be received, ver. 10—12. IV. The wonderful success of the gospel, for the overthrow of the devil's kingdom, ver. 13—17. V. The rejection and ruin of the Jews for their unbelief, ver. 18—25.

**B**EHOLD my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. 2 He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. 3 A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. 4 He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law.

We are sure that these verses are to be understood of Christ, for the evangelist tells us expressly that in him this prophecy was fulfilled, Matt. xii. 17—21. *Behold* with an eye of faith, behold and observe, behold and admire, *my servant, whom I uphold*. Let the Old-Testament saints behold and expect him; let the New-Testament saints behold and remember him. Now what must we behold and consider concerning him?

I. The Father's concern for him and relation to him, the confidence he put and the complacency he took in him. This put an honour upon him, and made him remarkable, above any other circumstance, v. 1. 1. God owns him as one employed for him:

He is *my servant*. Though he was a Son, yet, as a Mediator, he *took upon him the form of a servant*, learned obedience to the will of God and practised it, and laid out himself to advance the interests of God's kingdom, and so he was God's servant. 2. As one chosen by him: He is *my elect*. He did not thrust himself into the service, but was called of God, and pitched upon as the fittest person for it. Infinite Wisdom made the choice and then avowed it. 3. As one he put a confidence in: He is *my servant on whom I lean*; so some read it. The Father put a confidence in him that he would go through with his undertaking, and, in that confidence, brought many sons to glory. It was a great trust which the Father reposed in the Son, but he knew him to be *par negotio—equal to it*, both able and faithful. 4. As one he took care of: He is *my servant whom I uphold*; so we read it. The Father bore him up, and bore him out, in his undertaking; both were included in his upholding him; he stood by him and strengthened him. 5. As one whom he took an entire complacency in: *My elect, in whom my soul delights*. His delight was in him from eternity, when he was *by him as one brought up with him*, Prov. viii. 30. He had a particular satisfaction in his undertaking: he declared himself *well pleased in him* (Matt. iii. 17; xvii. 5), and *therefore* loved him, because he laid down his life for the sheep. Let our souls delight in Christ, rely on him, and rejoice in him; and thus let us be united to him, and then, for his sake, the Father will be well pleased with us.

II. The qualification of him for his office: *I have put my Spirit upon him*, to enable him to go through his undertaking, ch. lxi. i. The Spirit did not only come, but rest, upon him (ch. xi. 2), not by measure, as on others of God's servants, but without measure. Those whom God employs as his servants; as he will uphold them and be well pleased with them, so he will put his Spirit upon them.

III. The work to which he is appointed; it is to *bring forth judgment to the Gentiles*, that is, in infinite wisdom, holiness, and equity, to set up a religion in the world under the bonds of which the Gentiles should come and the blessings of which they should enjoy. The judgments of the Lord, which had been hidden from the Gentiles (Ps. cxlvii. 20), he came to bring forth to the Gentiles, for he was *to be a light to lighten them*.

IV. The mildness and tenderness with which he should pursue this undertaking, v. 2, 3. He shall carry it on, 1. In silence, and without noise: *He shall not strive nor cry*. It shall not be proclaimed, *Lo, here, is Christ*, or *Lo, he is there*; as when great princes ride in progress or make a public entry. He shall have no trumpet sounded before him, nor any noisy retinue to follow him. The opposition he meets with he shall

not strive against, but patiently *endure the contradiction of sinners against himself*. His kingdom is spiritual, and therefore its weapons are not carnal, nor is its appearance pompous; it comes not with observation. 2. Gently, and without rigour. Those that are wicked he will be patient with; when he has begun to crush them, so that they are as bruised reeds, he will give them space to repent and not immediately break them; though they are very offensive, as smoking flax (*ch. lxxv. 5*), yet he will bear with them, as he did with Jerusalem. Those that are weak he will be tender of; those that have but a little life, a little heat, that are weak as a reed, oppressed with doubts and fears, as a *bruised reed*; that are as *smoking flax*, as the wick of a candle newly lighted, which is ready to go out again, he will not despise them, will not plead against them with his great power, nor lay upon them more work or more suffering than they can bear, which would break and quench them, but will graciously consider their frame. More is implied than is expressed. *He will not break the bruised reed*, but will strengthen it, that it may become as a cedar in the courts of our God. *He will not quench the smoking flax*, but blow it up into a flame. Note, Jesus Christ is very tender towards those that have true grace, though they are but weak in it, and accepts the willingness of the spirit, pardoning and passing by the weakness of the flesh.

V. The courage and constancy with which he should persevere in this undertaking, so as to carry his point at last (*v. 4*): *He shall not fail nor be discouraged*. Though he meets with hard service and much opposition, and foresees how ungrateful the world will be, yet he goes on with his part of the work, till he is able to say, *It is finished*; and he enables his apostles and ministers to go on with theirs too, and not to fail nor be discouraged, till they also have finished their testimony. And thus he accomplishes what he undertook. 1. *He brings forth judgment unto truth*. By a long course of miracles, and his resurrection at last, he shall fully evince the truth of his doctrine and the divine origin and authority of that holy religion which he came to establish. 2. *He sets judgment in the earth*. He erects his government in the world, a church for himself among men, reforms the world, and by the power of his gospel and grace fixes such principles in the minds of men as tend to make them wise and just. 3. *The isles of the Gentiles wait for his law*, wait for his gospel, that is, bid it welcome as if it had been a thing they had long waited for. They shall become his disciples, shall sit at his feet, and be ready to receive the law from his mouth. *What wilt thou have us to do?*

5 Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the heavens and stretch-

ed them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein: 6 I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; 7 To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house. 8 I *am* the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images. 9 Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them. 10 Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise from the end of the earth, ye that go down to the sea, and all that is therein; the isles, and the inhabitants thereof. 11 Let the wilderness and the cities thereof lift up *their voice*, the villages that Kedar doth inhabit: let the inhabitants of the rock sing, let them shout from the top of the mountains. 12 Let them give glory unto the LORD, and declare his praise in the islands.

Here is, I. The covenant God made with and the commission he gave to the Messiah, *v. 5—7*, which are an exposition of *v. 1*, *Behold my servant, whom I uphold*.

1. The royal titles by which the great God here makes himself known, and distinguishes himself from all pretenders, speak very much his glory (*v. 5*): *Thus saith God the Lord*. And who art thou, Lord? Why, he is the fountain of all being and therefore the fountain of all power. He is the fountain of being, 1. In the upper world; for *he created the heavens and stretched them out* (*ch. xl. 22*), and keeps the vast expanse still upon the stretch. 2. In the lower world; for *he spread forth the earth*, and made it a capacious habitation, and that which comes out of it is produced by his power. 3. In the world of mankind: *He gives breath to the people upon it*, not only air to breathe in, but the breath of life itself and organs to breathe with; nay, he gives *spirit*, the powers and faculties of a rational soul, to those that walk therein. Now this is prefixed to God's covenant with the Messiah, and the commission given him, not only to show that he has authority to make such a covenant and give such a commission, and had power sufficient to bear him out, but



that the design of the work of redemption was to maintain the honour of the Creator, and to restore man to the allegiance he owes to God as his Maker.

2. The assurances which he gives to the Messiah of his presence with him in all he did pursuant to his undertaking speak much encouragement to him, v. 6. (1.) God owns that the Messiah did not take the honour of being Mediator to himself, but was called of God, that he was no intruder, no usurper, but was fairly brought to it (Heb. v. 4): *I have called thee in righteousness*. God not only did him no wrong in calling him to this hard service, he having voluntarily offered himself to it, but did himself right in providing for his own honour and performing the word which he had spoken. (2.) He promises to stand by him and strengthen him in it, to hold his hand, not only to his work, but in it, to hold his hand, that it might not shake, that it might not fail, and so to keep him. When an angel was sent from heaven to strengthen him in his agonies, and the Father himself was with him, then this promise was fulfilled. Note, Those whom God calls he will own and help, and will hold their hands.

3. The great intentions of this commission speak abundance of comfort to the children of men. He was given for a *covenant of the people*, for a mediator, or guarantee, of the covenant of grace, which is all summed up in him. God, in giving us Christ, has with him freely given us all the blessings of the new covenant. Two glorious blessings Christ, in his gospel, brings with him to the Gentile world—light and liberty. (1.) He is given for a *light to the Gentiles*, not only to reveal to them what they were concerned to know, and which otherwise they could not have known, but to open the blind eyes, that they might know it. By his Spirit in the word he presents the object; by his Spirit in the heart he prepares the organ. When the gospel came light came, a great light, to those that sat in darkness, Matt. iv. 16; John iii. 19. And St. Paul was sent to the Gentiles to *open their eyes*, Acts xxvi. 18. Christ is the light of the world. (2.) He is sent to proclaim liberty to the captives, as Cyrus did, *to bring out the prisoners*; not only to open the prison-doors, and give them leave to go out, which was all that Cyrus could do, but to bring them out, to induce and enable them to make use of their liberty, which none did but those whose spirits God stirred up. This Christ does by his grace.

II. The ratification and confirmation of this grant. That we may be assured of the validity of it consider, 1. The authority of him that makes the promise (v. 8): *I am the Lord, Jehovah, that is my name*, and that was the name by which he made himself known when he began to perform the promise made to the patriarchs; whereas, be-

fore, he manifested himself by the name of God Almighty, Exod. vi. 3. If he is the Lord that gives being and birth to all things, he will give being and birth to this promise. If his name be *Jehovah*, which speaks him God alone, we may be sure his name is *jealous*, and he *will not give his glory to another*, whoever it is that stands in competition with him, especially not to *graven images*. He will send the Messiah to open men's eyes, that so he may turn them from the service of dumb idols to serve the living God, because, though he has long winked at the times of ignorance, he will now maintain his prerogative, and will not give his glory to graven images. He will perform his word because he will not lose the honour of being true to it, nor be ever charged with falsehood by the worshippers of false gods. He will deliver his people from under the power of idolaters because it looks as if he had given his praise to graven images when he gives up his own worshippers to be worshippers of images. 2. The accomplishment of the promises he had formerly made concerning his church, which are proofs of the truth of his word and the kindness he bears to his people (v. 9): "*Behold, the former things have come to pass*; hitherto the Lord has helped his church, has supported her under former burdens, relieved her in former straits; and this in performance of the promises made to the fathers. *There has not failed one word*, 1 Kings viii. 56. *And now new things do I declare*. Now I will make new promises, which shall as certainly be fulfilled in their season as old ones were; now I will bestow new favours, such as have not been conferred formerly. Old-Testament blessings you have had abundantly; now I declare New-Testament blessings, not a fruitful country and dominion over your neighbours, but *spiritual blessings in heavenly things*. *Before they spring forth* in the preaching of the gospel *I tell you of them*, under the type and figure of the former things." Note, The receipt of former mercies may encourage us to hope for further mercies; for God is constant in his care for his people, and his compassions are still new.

III. The song of joy and praise which should be sung hereupon to the glory of God (v. 10): *Sing unto the Lord a new song*, a New-Testament song. The giving of Christ for a *light to the Gentiles* (v. 6) was a new thing, and very surprising. The apostle speaks of it as a mystery which, in other ages, was not made known, as it is now revealed, *that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs*, Eph. iii. 5, 6. Now, this being the new thing which God declares, the newness of the song which is to be sung on this occasion is this, that whereas, before, the songs of the Lord were very much confined to the temple at Jerusalem (David's psalm were in the language of the Jews only, and



sung by them and in their own country only; for, when they were in a strange land, they hung their harps on the willow-trees and could not sing the Lord's song, as we find, Ps. cxxxvii. 2—4), now the songs of holy joy and praise shall be sung all the world over. The Gentile nations shall share equally with the Jews in New-Testament blessings, and therefore shall join in New-Testament praises and acts of worship. There shall be churches set up in Gentile nations and they shall sing a new song. The conversion of the Gentiles is often foretold under this notion, as appears, Rom. xv. 9—11. It is here promised that the praises of God's grace shall be sung with joy and thankfulness, 1. By those that live in the end of the earth, in countries that lie most remote from Jerusalem. *From the uttermost parts of the earth have we heard songs, ch. xxiv.* 16. This was fulfilled when Christianity was planted in our land. 2. By mariners and merchants, and those that go down to the sea, that do business in great waters, and suck the riches of the sea, and so make themselves masters of the fulness thereof and all that is therein, with which they shall praise God, and justly, for it is his, Ps. xxiv. 1; xcv. 5. The Jews traded little at sea; if therefore God's praises be sung by those that go down to the sea, it must be by Gentiles. Sea-faring men are called upon to praise God, Ps. cvii. 23. 3. By the islands and the inhabitants thereof, v. 10, and again, v. 12. Let them declare his praise in the islands, the isles of the Gentiles, probably referring to the islands of Greece. 4. By the wilderness and the cities thereof, and the villages of Kedar. These lay east from Jerusalem, as the islands lay west, so that the gospel songs should be sung from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same. The whole Gentile world had been like an island, cut off from communication with God's church, and like a wilderness, uncultivated and bringing forth no fruit to God; but now the islands and the wilderness shall praise God. 5. By the inhabitants of the rock, and those that dwell on the tops of the mountains, not only the Gentiles, but the poorest and meanest and most despicable, those that dwell in cottages, as well as those that inhabit cities and villages. The rude and most barbarous, as the mountaineers commonly are, shall be civilized by the gospel. Or by the inhabitants of the rock may be meant the inhabitants of that part of Arabia which is called *Petræa—the rocky*. Perhaps the neighbouring countries shared in the joy of the Israelites when they returned out of Babylon and some of them came and joined with them in their praises; but we find not that it was to any such degree as might fully answer this illustrious prophecy, and must conclude that it reaches further, and was fulfilled in that which many other proph-

cies of the joy of the nations are said in the New-Testament to be fulfilled in, the conversion of the Gentiles to the faith of Christ. When they are brought into the church they are brought to give glory to the Lord; then they are to him for a name and a praise, and they make it their business to praise him. He is glorified in them and by them.

13 The LORD shall go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: he shall cry, yea, roar; he shall prevail against his enemies. 14 I have long time holden my peace; I have been still, and refrained myself: now will I cry like a travailing woman; I will destroy and devour at once. 15 I will make waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbs; and I will make the rivers islands, and I will dry up the pools. 16 And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them. 17 They shall be turned back, they shall be greatly ashamed, that trust in graven images, that say to the molten images, Ye are our gods.

It comes all to one whether we make these verses (as some do) the song itself that is to be sung by the Gentile world or a prophecy of what God will do to make way for the singing of that song, that evangelical new song.

I. He will appear in his power and glory more than ever. So he did in the preaching of his gospel, in the divine power and energy which went along with it, and in the wonderful success it had in the pulling down of Satan's strongholds, v. 13, 14. He had long held his peace, and been still, and refrained himself, while he winked at the times of the ignorance of the Gentile world (Acts xvii. 30), and suffered all nations to walk in their own ways (Acts xiv. 16); but now he shall go forth as a mighty man, as a man of war, to attack the devil's kingdom and give it a fatal blow. The going forth of the gospel is thus represented, Rev. vi. 2. Christ, in it, went forth conquering and to conquer. The ministry of the apostles is called their warfare; and they were the soldiers of Jesus Christ. He shall stir up jealousy, shall appear more jealous than ever for the glory of his own name and against idolatry. 1. He shall cry, in the preaching of his word, cry like a travailing woman; for the ministers of Christ preached as men in



earnest, and that travailed in birth again till they saw Christ formed in the souls of the people, Gal. iv. 19. *He shall cry, yea, roar,* in the gospel woes, which are more terrible than the roaring of a lion, and which must be preached along with gospel blessings to awaken a sleeping world. 2. He shall conquer by the power of his Spirit: *He shall prevail against his enemies,* shall prevail to make them friends, Col. i. 21. Those that contradict and blaspheme his gospel, he shall prevail to put them to silence and shame. He will destroy and devour at once all the oppositions of the powers of darkness. Satan shall fall as lightning from heaven, and he that had the power of death shall be destroyed. As a type and figure of this, to make way for the redemption of the Jews out of Babylon, God will humble the pride, and break the power, of their oppressors, and *will at once destroy and devour the Babylonian monarchy.* In accomplishing this destruction of Babylon by the Persian army under the command of Cyrus, *he will make waste mountains and hills,* level the country, and *dry up all their herbs.* The army, as usual, shall either carry off the forage or destroy it, and by laying bridges of boats over rivers shall turn them into islands, and so drain the fens and low grounds, to make way for the march of their army, that the pools shall be dried up. Thus, when the gospel shall be preached, it shall have a free course, and that which hinders the progress of it shall be taken out of the way.

II. He will manifest his favour and grace towards those whose spirits he had stirred up to follow him, as Ezra i. 5. Those who ask the way to Zion he will show the way, and lead in it, v. 16. Those who by nature were blind, and those who, being under convictions of sin and wrath are quite at a loss and know not what to do with themselves, God will *lead by a way that they knew not,* will show them the way to life and happiness by Jesus Christ, who is the way, and will conduct and carry them on in that way, which before they were strangers to. Thus, in the conversion of Paul, he was struck blind first, and then God revealed his Son in him, and made the scales to fall from his eyes. They are weak in knowledge, and the truths of God at first seem unintelligible; but God will *make darkness light before them,* and knowledge shall be easy to them. They are weak in duty, the commands of God seem impracticable, and insuperable difficulties are in the way of their obedience; but God will *make crooked things straight;* their way shall be plain, and the yoke easy. Those whom God brings into the right way he will guide in it. As a type of this, he will lead the Jews, when they return out of captivity, in a ready road to their own land again, and nothing shall occur to perplex or embarrass them in

their journey. These are great things, and kind things, very great and very kind; but lest any should say, "They are too great, too kind, to be expected from God by such an undeserving people as that of the Jews, such an undeserving world as that of the Gentiles," he adds, *These things will I do unto them,* take my word for it I will, and I will not forsake them; he that begins to show this great mercy will go on to do them good.

III. He will particularly put those to confusion who adhere to idols notwithstanding the attempts made by the preaching of the gospel to turn them from idols (v. 17): *They shall be turned back, and greatly ashamed, that trust in graven images.* The Babylonians shall when they see how the Jews, who despise their images, are owned and delivered by the God they worship without images, and the Gentiles when they see how idolatry falls before the preaching of the gospel, is scattered like darkness before the light of the sun, and melts like snow before its heat. They shall be ashamed that ever they said to these molten images, *You are our gods;* for how can those help their worshippers who cannot help themselves, nor save themselves from falling into contempt? In times of reformation, when many turn from iniquity, and sin, being generally deserted, becomes unfashionable, it may be hoped that those who will not otherwise be reclaimed will be wrought upon by that consideration to be ashamed of it.

18 Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see. 19 Who is blind, but my servant? Or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? Who is blind as *he that is* perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant? 20 Seeing many things, but thou observest not; opening the ears, but he heareth not. 21 The Lord is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will magnify the law, and make *it* honourable. 22 But this *is* a people robbed and spoiled; *they are* all of them snared in holes, and they are hid in prison-houses: they are for a prey, and none delivereth; for a spoil, and none saith, Restore. 23 Who among you will give ear to this? *Who* will hearken and hear for the time to come? 24 Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? Did not the Lord, he against whom we have sinned? For they would not walk in his ways, neither were they obedient unto his law. 25 Therefore he hath poured upon him the fury of



his anger, and the strength of battle: and it hath set him on fire round about, yet he knew not; and it burned him, yet he laid *it* not to heart.

The prophet, having spoken by way of comfort and encouragement to the believing Jews who waited for the consolation of Israel, here turns to those among them who were unbelieving, for their conviction and humiliation. Among those who were in captivity in Babylon there were some who were as the evil figs in Jeremiah's vision, who were sent thither for their hurt, to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth, for a reproach and a proverb, Jer. xxiv. 9. In them there was a type of the Jews who rejected Christ and were rejected by him, and then fell more than ever under the curse, when those who believed were inheriting the blessing; for they were broken, and ruined, and remain dispersed unto this day. Observe,

I. The call that is given to this people (v. 18): "*Hear, you deaf, and attend to the joyful sound, and look you blind, that you may see the joyful light.*" There is no absurdity in this command, nor is it unbecoming the wisdom and goodness of God to call us to do that good which yet of ourselves we are not sufficient for; for those have natural powers which they may employ so as to do better than they do, and may have supernatural grace if it be not their own fault, who yet labour under a moral impotency to that which is good. This call to the deaf to hear and the blind to see is like the command given to the man that had the withered hand to stretch it forth; though he could not do this, because it was withered, yet, if he had not attempted to do it, he would not have been healed, and his being healed thereupon was owing, not to his act, but to the divine power.

II. The character that is given of them (v. 19, 20): "*Who is blind, but my servant, or deaf as my messenger?*" The people of the Jews were in profession God's servants, and their priests and elders his messengers (Mal. ii. 7); but they were deaf and blind. The verse before may be understood as spoken to the Gentile idolaters, whom he calls *deaf and blind*, because they worshipped gods that were so. "But," says he, "no wonder you are deaf and blind when my own people are as bad as you, and many of them as much set upon idolatry."

1. He complains of their sottishness—they are blind; and of their stubbornness—they are deaf. They were even worse than the Gentiles themselves. *Corruptio optima est pessima—What is best becomes, when corrupted, the worst.* "Who is so wilfully, so scandalously, blind and deaf as my servant and my messenger, as Jacob who is my servant ch. xli. 8), and as their prophets and teachers who are my messengers? Who

is blind as he that in profession and pretension is perfect, that should come nearer to perfection than other people, their priests and prophets? The one prophesies falsely, and the other bears rule by their means; and who so blind as those that will not see when they have the light shining in their faces?" Note, (1.) It is a common thing, but a very sad thing, for those that in profession are God's servants and messengers to be themselves blind and deaf in spiritual things, ignorant, erroneous, and very careless. (2.) Blindness and deafness in spiritual things are worse in those that profess themselves to be God's servants and messengers than in others. It is in them the greater sin and shame, the greater dishonour to God, and to themselves a greater damnation.

2. The prophet goes on (v. 20) to describe the blindness and obstinacy of the Jewish nation, just as our Saviour describes it in his time (Matt. xiii. 14, 15): "*Seeing many things, but thou observest not.*" Multitudes are ruined for want of observing that which they cannot but see; they perish, not through ignorance, but mere carelessness. The Jews in our Saviour's time saw many proofs of his divine mission, but they did not observe them; they seemed to open their ears to him, but they did not hear, that is, they did not heed, did not understand, or believe, or obey, and then it was all one as if they had not heard.

III. The care God will take of the honour of his own name, notwithstanding their blindness and deafness, especially of his word, which he has magnified above all his name. *Shall the unbelief and obstinacy of men make the promise of God of no effect? God forbid*, Rom. iii. 3, 4. No, though they are blind and deaf, God will be no loser in his glory (v. 21): "*The Lord is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; not well pleased with their sin, but well pleased in the manifestation of his own righteousness, in rejecting them for rejecting the great salvation.*" He speaks as one well pleased, ch. i. 24: "*Ah! I will ease me of my adversaries; and Ezek. v. 13, I will be comforted.*" The scripture was fulfilled in the casting off of the Jews as well as in the calling in of the Gentiles, and therein the Lord will be well pleased. *He will magnify the law* (divine revelation in all the parts of it) *and will make it honourable.* The law is truly honourable, and the things of it are great things; and, if men will not magnify it by their obedience to it, God will magnify it himself by punishing them for their disobedience. He will magnify the law by accomplishing what is written in it, will magnify its authority, its efficacy, its equity. He will do it at last, when all men shall be judged by the law of liberty, James ii. 12. He is doing it every day. What is it that God is doing in the world, but magnifying the law and making it honourable?

IV. The calamities God will bring upon



the Jewish nation for their wilful blindness and deafness, *v.* 22. They are *robbed and spoiled*. Those that were impenitent and unreformed in Babylon were sentenced to perpetual captivity. It was for their sins that they were spoiled of all their possessions, not only in their own land, but in the land of their enemies. They were some of them *snared in holes*, and others *hidden in prison-houses*. They cannot help themselves, for they are snared. Their friends cannot help them, for they are hidden; and their enemies have forgotten them in their prisons. They, and all they have, are for a prey and for a spoil; and there is none that delivers either by force or ransom, nor any that dares say to the proud oppressors, *Restore*. There they lie, and there they are likely to lie. This had its full accomplishment in the final destruction of the Jewish nation by the Romans, which God brought upon them for rejecting the gospel of Christ.

V. The counsel given them in order to their relief; for, though their case be sad, it is not desperate.

1. The generality of them are deaf; they will not hearken to the voice of God's word. He will therefore try his rod, and see *who among them will give ear to that*, *v.* 23. We must not despair concerning those who have been long reasoned with in vain; some of them may, at length, give ear and hearken. If one method do not take effect, another may, and sinners shall be left inexcusable. Observe, (1.) We may all of us, if we will, hear the voice of God, and we are called and invited to hear it. (2.) It is worth while to enquire who they are that perceive God speaking to them and are willing to hear him. (3.) Of the many that hear the voice of God there are very few that hearken to it or heed it, that hear it with attention and application. (4.) In hearing the word we must have an eye to the time to come. We must hear for hereafter, for what may occur between us and the grave; we must especially hear for eternity. We must hear the word with another world in our eye.

2. The counsel is, (1.) To acknowledge the hand of God in their afflictions, and, whoever were the instruments, to have an eye to him as the principal agent (*v.* 24): "*Who gave Jacob and Israel*, that people that used to have such an interest in heaven and such a dominion on earth, who gave them *for a spoil to the robbers*, as they are now to the Babylonians and to the Romans? *Did not the Lord?*" You know he did; consider it then, and hear his voice in these judgments." (2.) To acknowledge that they had provoked God thus to abandon them, and had brought all these calamities upon themselves. [1.] These punishments were first inflicted on them for their disobedience to the laws of God: It is he *against whom we have sinned*; the prophet puts himself into the number of the sinners, as Dan. ix.

7, 8. "*We have sinned*; we have all brought fuel to the fire; and there are those among us that have wilfully refused to walk in his ways. Jacob and Israel would never have been given up to the robbers if they had not by their iniquities sold themselves. *Therefore* it is, because they have violated the commands of the law, that God has brought upon them the curses of the law; he has not dropped, but *poured upon him the fury of his anger and the strength of battle*, all the desolations of war, which have *set him on fire round about*; for God surrounds the wicked with his judgments, as he does the righteous with his favours. See the power of God's anger; there is no resisting it, no escaping it. See the mischief that sin makes; it provokes God to anger against a people, and so kindles a universal conflagration, sets all on fire. [2.] These judgments were continued upon them for their senselessness and incorrigibility under the rod of God. The fire of God's wrath kindled upon him, and *he knew it not*, was not aware of it, took no notice of the judgments, at least not of the hand of God in them. Nay, *it burned him*, and, though he could not then but know it and feel it, yet he *laid it not to heart*, was not awakened by the fiery rebukes he was under nor at all affected with them. Those who are not humbled by less judgments must expect greater; for when God judges he will overcome.

## CHAP. XLIII.

The contents of this chapter are much the same with those of the foregoing chapter, looking at the release of the Jews out of their captivity, but looking through that, and beyond that, to the great work of man's redemption by Jesus Christ, and the grace of the gospel, which through him believers partake of. Here are, I. Precious promises made to God's people in their affliction, of his presence with them, for their support under it, and their deliverance out of it, *ver.* 1-7. II. A challenge to idols to vie with the omniscience and omnipotence of God, *ver.* 8-13. III. Encouragement given to the people of God to hope for their deliverance out of Babylon, from the consideration of what God did for their fathers when he brought them out of Egypt, *ver.* 14-21. IV. A method taken to prepare the people for their deliverance, by putting them in mind of their sins, by which they had provoked God to send them into captivity and continue them there, that they might repent and seek to God for pardoning mercy, *ver.* 22-28.

**B**UT now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called *thee* by thy name; thou art mine. 2 When thou passest through the waters, I *will be* with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. 3 For I *am* the LORD thy God, the Holy one of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt *for* thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. 4 Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I



have loved thee : therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. 5 Fear not : for I *am* with thee : I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west ; 6 I will say to the north, Give up ; and to the south, Keep not back : bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth ; 7 *Even* every one that is called by my name : for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him ; yea, I have made him.

This chapter has a plain connexion with the close of the foregoing chapter, but a very surprising one. It was there said that Jacob and Israel would not walk in God's ways, and that when he corrected them for their disobedience they were stubborn and laid it not to heart ; and now one would think it should have followed that God would utterly abandon and destroy them ; but no, the next words are, *But now, fear not, O Jacob ! O Israel ! I have redeemed thee, and thou art mine.* Though many among them were untractable and incorrigible, yet God would continue his love and care for his people, and the body of that nation should still be reserved for mercy. God's goodness takes occasion from man's badness to appear so much the more illustrious. *Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound* (Rom. v. 20), and *mercy rejoices against judgment*, as having prevailed and carried the day, Jam. ii. 13. Now the sun, breaking out thus of a sudden from behind a thick and dark cloud, shines the brighter, and with a pleasing surprise. The expressions of God's favour and good-will to his people here are very high, and speak abundance of comfort to all the spiritual seed of upright Jacob and praying Israel ; for *to us is this gospel preached as well as unto those that were captives in Babylon*, Heb. iv. 2. Here we have,

I. The grounds of God's care and concern for his people and the interests of his church and kingdom among men. Jacob and Israel, though in a sinful miserable condition, shall be looked after ; for, 1. They are God's *workmanship, created by him unto good works*, Eph. ii. 10. He has created them and formed them, not only given them a being, but this being, formed them into a people, constituted their government, and incorporated them by the charter of his covenant. The new creature, wherever it is, is of God's forming, and *he will not forsake the work of his own hands*. 2. They are the people of his purchase : he has redeemed them. Out of the land of Egypt he first redeemed them, and out of many another bondage, *in his love, and in his pity* (ch. lxiii. 9) ; much more will he take care of those who are redeemed with the blood of his Son. 3. They are his peculiar people, whom he has distinguished

from others, and set apart for himself : he has called them by name, as those he has a particular intimacy with and concern for, and they are his, are appropriated to him and he has a special interest in them. 4. He is their God in covenant (v. 3) : *I am the Lord thy God*, worshipped by thee and engaged by promise to thee, *the Holy One of Israel*, the God of Israel ; for the true God is a holy one, and holiness becomes his house. And upon all these accounts he might justly say, *Fear not* (v. 1), and again v. 5, *Fear not*. Those that have God for them need not fear who or what can be against them.

II. The former instances of this care. 1. God had purchased them dearly : *I gave Egypt for thy ransom* ; for Egypt was quite laid waste by one plague after another, all their first-born were slain and all their men of war drowned ; and all this to force a way for Israel's deliverance from them. Egypt shall be sacrificed rather than Israel shall continue in slavery, when the time has come for their release. The Ethiopians had invaded them in Asa's time ; but they shall be destroyed rather than Israel shall be disturbed. And if this was reckoned so great a thing, to give Egypt for their ransom, what reason have we to admire God's love to us in giving his own Son to be a *ransom for us* ! 1 John iv. 10. What are Ethiopia and Seba, all their lives and all their treasures, compared with the blood of Christ ? 2. He had prized them accordingly, and they were very dear to him (v. 4) : *Since thou hast been precious in my sight thou hast been honourable*. Note, True believers are precious in God's sight ; they are his jewels, his peculiar treasure (Exod. xix. 5) ; he loves them, his delight is in them, above any people. His church is his vineyard. And this makes God's people truly honourable, and their name great ; for men are really what they are in God's eye. When the forces of Sennacherib, that they might be diverted from falling upon Israel, were directed by Providence to fall upon Egypt, Ethiopia, and Seba, then God gave those countries for Israel, and showed how precious his people were in his sight. So some understand it.

III. The further instances God would yet give them of his care and kindness. 1. He would be present with them in their greatest difficulties and dangers (v. 2) : *When thou passest through the waters and the rivers, through the fire and the flame, I will be with thee*, and that shall be thy security ; when dangers are very imminent and threatening, thou shalt be delivered out of them." Did they, in their journey, pass through deep waters ? They should not perish in them : *"The rivers shall not overflow thee*. Should they by their persecutors be cast into a fiery furnace, for their constant adherence to their God, yet then the flame should not kindle upon them, which was fulfilled in the letter in the wonderfui



preservation of the three children, Dan. iii. Though they went through fire and water, which would be to them as the *valley of the shadow of death*, yet, while they had God with them, they need fear no evil, they should be borne up, and *brought out into a wealthy place*, Ps. lvi. 12. 2. He would still, when there was occasion, make all the interests of the children of men give way to the interests of his own children: "*I will give men for thee, great men, mighty men, and men of war, and people (men by whole-sale) for thy life.*" Nations shall be sacrificed to thy welfare." All shall be cut off rather than God's Israel shall, so precious are they in his sight. The affairs of the world shall all be ordered and directed so as to be most for the good of the church, 2 Chron. xvi. 9. 3. Those of them that were scattered and dispersed in other nations should all be gathered in and share in the blessings of the public, v. 5—7. Some of the seed of Israel were dispersed into all countries, east, west, north, and south, or into all the parts of the country of Babylon; but those whose spirits God stirred up to go to Jerusalem should be fetched in from all parts; divine grace should reach those that lay most remote, and at the greatest distance from each other; and, when the time should come, nothing should prevent their coming together to return in a body, in answer to that prayer (Ps. cvi. 47), *Gather us from among the heathen*, and in performance of that promise (Deut. xxx. 4), *If any of thine be driven to the utmost parts of heaven, thence will the Lord thy God gather thee*, which we find pleaded on behalf of the children of the captivity, Neh. i. 9. But who are the seed of Israel that shall be thus carefully gathered in? He tells us (v. 7) they are such as God has marked for mercy; for, (1.) They are called by his name; they make profession of religion, and are distinguished from the rest of the world by their covenant-relation to God and denomination from him. (2.) They are created for his glory; the spirit of Israelites is created in them, and they are formed according to the will of God, and these shall be gathered in. Note, Those only are fit to be called by the name of God that are created by his grace for his glory; and those whom God has created and called shall be gathered in now to Christ as their head and hereafter to heaven as their home. *He shall gather in his elect from the four winds.* This promise points at the gathering in of the dispersed of the Gentiles, and the strangers scattered, by the gospel of Christ, who died to *gather together in one* the children of God that were scattered abroad; for the promise was to all that were afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call and create. God is with the church, and therefore let her not fear; none that belong to her shall be lost.

8 Bring forth the blind people that

have eyes, and the deaf that have ears. 9 Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled: who among them can declare this, and show us former things? Let them bring forth their witnesses, that they may be justified: or let them hear, and say, *It is truth.* 10 Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. 11 I, *even I, am the Lord*; and beside me *there is no saviour.* 12 I have declared, and have saved, and I have showed, when *there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God.* 13 Yea, before the day was, I am he; and *there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it?*

God here challenges the worshippers of idols to produce such proofs of the divinity of their false gods as even this very instance (to go no further) of the redemption of the Jews out of Babylon furnished the people of Israel with, to prove that their God is the true and living God, and he only.

I. The patrons of idolatry are here called to appear, and say what they have to say in defence of their idols, v. 8, 9. Their gods have *eyes and see not, ears and hear not*, and those that make them and trust in them are like unto them; so David had said (Ps. cxv. 8), to which the prophet seems here to refer when he calls idolaters *blind people that have eyes, and deaf people that have ears.* They have the shape, capacities, and faculties, of men; but they are, in effect, destitute of reason and common sense, or they would never worship gods of their own making. "*Let all the nations therefore be gathered together, let them help one another, and with a combined force plead the cause of their dunghill gods; and, if they have nothing to say in their own justification, let them hear what the God of Israel has to say for their conviction and confutation.*"

II. God's witnesses are subpoenaed, or summoned to appear, and give in evidence for him (v. 10): "*You, O Israelites! all you that are called by my name, you are all my witnesses, and so is my servant whom I have chosen.*" It was Christ himself that was so described (ch. xlii. 1), *My servant and my elect.* Observe,

1. All the prophets that testified to Christ, and Christ himself, the great prophet, are here appealed to as God's witnesses. (1.)

God's people are witnesses for him, and can attest, upon their own knowledge and experience, concerning the power of his grace, the sweetness of his comforts, the tenderness of his providence, and the truth of his promise. They will be forward to witness for him that he is gracious and that no word of his has fallen to the ground. (2.) His prophets are in a particular manner witnesses for him, with whom his secret is, and who know more of him than others do. But the Messiah especially is given to be a witness for him to the people; having lain in his bosom from eternity, he has declared him. Now,

2. Let us see what the point is which these witnesses are called to prove (v. 12): *You are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God.* Note, Those who do themselves acknowledge that the Lord is God should be ready to testify what they know of him to others, that they also may be brought to the acknowledgment of it. *I believed, therefore have I spoken.* Particularly, "Since you cannot but know, and believe, and understand, you must be ready to bear record, (1.) That I am he, the only true God, that I am a being self-existent and self-sufficient; I am he whom you are to fear, and worship, and trust in. Nay (v. 13), *before the day was* (before the first day of time, before the creation of the light, and, consequently, from eternity) *I am he.*" The idols were but of yesterday, *new gods that came newly up* (Dent. xxxii. 17); but the God of Israel was from everlasting. (2.) That *there was no God formed before me, nor shall be after me.* The idols were gods formed (*dii facti*—made gods, or rather *fictitii*—fictitious); *by nature they were no gods*, Gal. iv. 8. But God had a being from eternity, yea, and a religion in this world before there were either idols or idolaters (truth is more ancient than error); and he will have a being to eternity, and will be worshipped and glorified when idols are famished and abolished and idolatry shall be no more. True religion will keep its ground, and survive all opposition and competition. *Great is the truth, and will prevail.* (3.) That *I, even I, am the Lord*, the great Jehovah, who is, and was, and is to come; and *besides me there is no Saviour*, v. 11. See what it is that the great God glories in, not so much that he is the only ruler as that he is the only Saviour; for he *delights to do good*: he is the *Saviour of all men*, 1 Tim. iv. 10.

3. Let us see what the proofs are which are produced for the confirmation of this point. It appears,

(1.) That the Lord is God, by two proofs: [1.] He has an infinite and infallible knowledge, as is evident from the predictions of his word (v. 12): *I have declared and I have shown* that which has without fail come to pass; nay, I never declared nor showed any thing but it has been accomplished. *I showed*

*when there was no strange god among you*, that is, when you pretended not to consult any oracles but mine, nor to have any prophets but mine." It is said, when they came out of Egypt, that *the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him* [2.] He has an infinite and irresistible power, as is evident from the performances of his providence. He pleads not only, I have *shown*, but, I have *saved*, not only foretold what none else could foresee, but done what none else could do; for (v. 13), "*None can deliver out of my hand* those whom I will punish; not only no man can, but none of all the gods of the heathen can protect." It is therefore *a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*, because there is no getting out of them again. "I will work what I have designed, both in mercy and judgment, and who shall either oppose or retard it?"

(2.) That the gods of the heathen, who are rivals with him, are not only inferior to him, but no gods at all, which is proved (v. 9) by a challenge: *Who among them can declare this that I now declare?* Who can foretel things to come? Nay, which of them can *show us former things?* ch. xli. 22. They cannot so much as inspire an historian, much less a prophet. They are challenged to join issue upon this: *Let them bring forth their witnesses*, to prove their omniscience and omnipotence. And, [1.] If they do prove them, they shall be justified, the idols in demanding homage and the idolaters in paying it. [2.] If they do not prove them, *let them say, It is truth*; let them own the true God, and receive the truth concerning him, that he is God alone. The cause of God is not afraid to stand a fair trial; but it may reasonably be expected that those who cannot justify themselves in their irreligion should submit to the power of the truth and true religion.

14 Thus saith the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and have brought down all their nobles, and the Chaldeans, whose cry is in the ships. 15 I am the LORD, your Holy One, the creator of Israel, your King. 16 Thus saith the LORD, which maketh a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters; 17 Which bringeth forth the chariot and horse, the army and the power; they shall lie down together, they shall not rise: they are extinct, they are quenched as tow. 18 Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old. 19 Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth;



shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, *and* rivers in the desert. 20 The beast of the field shall honour me, the dragons and the owls: because I give waters in the wilderness, *and* rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen. 21 This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise.

To so low an ebb were the faith and hope of God's people in Babylon brought that there needed line upon line to assure them that they should be released out of their captivity; and therefore, that they might have strong consolation, the assurances of it are often repeated, and here very expressly and encouragingly.

I. He here takes to himself such titles of his honour as were very encouraging to them. He is *the Lord their Redeemer*, not only he will redeem them, but will take it upon him as his office and make it his business to do so. If he be their God, he will be all that to them which they need, and therefore, when they are in bondage, he will be their Redeemer. He is *the Holy One of Israel* (v. 14), and again (v. 15), *their Holy One*, and therefore will make good every word he has spoken to them. He is *the Creator of Israel*, that made them a people out of nothing (for that is creation), nay, worse than nothing; and he is their *King*, that owns them as his people and presides among them.

II. He assures them he will find out a way to break the power of their oppressors that held them captives and filled up the measure of their own iniquity by their resolution never to let them go, *ch. xiv. 17*. God will take care to send a victorious prince and army to Babylon, that shall *bring down all their nobles*, and lay their honour in the dust, and all their people too, even *the Chaldeans, whose cry is in the ships* (for seamen are apt to be noisy), or whose cry is *to the ships*, as their refuge when the city is taken, that they may escape by the benefit of their great river. Note, The destruction of Babylon must make way for the enlargement of God's people. And in the prediction of the fall of the New-Testament Babylon we meet with the cries and lamentations of the sailors, *Rev. xviii. 17, 18*. And observe, It is for Israel's sake that Babylon is ruined, to make way for their deliverance.

III. He reminds them of the great things he did for their fathers when he brought them out of the land of Egypt; for so it may be read (v. 16, 17): "*Thus saith the Lord, who did make a way in the sea, the Red Sea, and did bring forth Pharaoh's chariot and horse, that they might lie down together in the bottom of the sea, and never rise, but be extinct. He that did this can,*

*if he please, make a way for you in the sea when you return out of Babylon, and will do so rather than leave you there.*" Note, For the encouragement of our faith and hope, it is good for us often to remember what God has done formerly for his people against his and their enemies. Think particularly what he did at the Red Sea, how he made it, 1. A road to his people, a straight way, a near way, nay, a refuge to them, into which they fled and were safe, the waters being a wall unto them. 2. A grave to his enemies. The chariot and horse were drawn out by him who is Lord of all hosts, on purpose that they might fall together; howbeit, *they meant not so*, *Mic. iv. 11, 12*.

IV. He promises to do yet greater things for them than he had done in the days of old; so that they should not have reason to ask, in a way of complaint, as Gideon did, *Where are all the wonders that our fathers told us of?* for they should see them repeated, nay, they should see them outdone (v. 18): "*Remember not the former things*, from them to take occasion, as some do, to undervalue the present things, as if *the former days were better than these*; no, you may, if you will, comparatively forget them, and yet know enough by the events of your own day to convince you that the Lord is God alone; for, *behold, the Lord will do a new thing*, no way inferior, both for the wonder and the worth of the mercy, to the things of old." The best exposition of this is, *Jer. xvi. 14, 15; xxiii. 7, 8. It shall no more be said, The Lord liveth that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt*; that is an old thing, the remembrance of which will be in a manner lost in the new thing; in the new proof that the Lord liveth, for he brought up the children of Israel out of the land of the north. Though former mercies must not be forgotten, fresh mercies must in a special manner be improved. *Now it springs forth*, as it were a surprise upon you; you are like those that dream. *Shall you not know it?* And will you not own God's hand in it?

V. He promises not only to deliver them out of Babylon, but to conduct them safely and comfortably to their own land (v. 19, 20): "*I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert*"; for, it seems, the way from Babylon to Canaan, as well as from Egypt, lay through a desert land, which, while the returning captives passed through, God would provide for them, that their camp should be both well victualled and under a good conduct. The same power that made a way in the sea (v. 16) can make a way in the wilderness, and will force its passage through the greatest difficulties. And he that made dry land in the waters can produce waters in the driest land, in such abundance as not only to give drink to his people, his chosen, but to the beasts of the field, also the dragons and the ostriches, who



are therefore said to honour God for it; it is such a sensible refreshment, and yields them so much satisfaction, that, if they were capable of doing it, they would praise God for it, and shame man, who is made capable of praising his benefactor and does not. Now, 1. This looks back to what God did for Israel when he led them through the wilderness from Egypt to Canaan, and fetched water out of a rock to follow them; what God did for them formerly he would do again, for he is still the same. And, though we do not find that the miracle was repeated in their return out of Babylon, yet the mercy was, in the common course of Providence, for which it became them to be no less thankful to God. 2. It looks forward, not only to all the instances of God's care of the Jewish church in the latter ages of it, between their return from Babylon and the coming of Christ, but to the grace of the gospel, especially as it is manifested to the Gentile world, by which a way is opened in the wilderness and rivers in the desert; the world, which lay like a desert, in ignorance and unfruitfulness, was blessed with divine direction and divine comforts, and, in order to both, with a plentiful effusion of the Spirit. The sinners of the Gentiles, who had been as the beasts of the field, running wild, fierce as the dragons, stupid as the owls or ostriches, shall be brought to honour God for the extent of his grace to his chosen among them.

VI. He traces up all these promised blessings to their great original, the purposes and designs of his own glory (v. 21): *This people have I formed for myself*, and therefore I do all this for them, that they may *show forth my praise*. Note, 1. The church is of God's forming, and so are all the living members of it. The new heavens, the new earth, the new man, are the work of God's hand, and are no more, no better, than he makes them; they are fashioned according to his will. 2. He forms it for himself. He that is the first cause is the highest end both of the first and of the new creation. *The Lord has made all things for himself*, his Israel especially, to be to him for a *people*, and for a *name*, and for a *praise*; and no otherwise can they be for him, or serviceable to him, than as his grace is glorified in them, Jer. xiii. 11; Eph. i. 6, 12, 14. 3. It is therefore our duty to show forth his praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to his service. As he formed us, so he feeds us, and keeps us, and leads us, and all for himself; for every instance therefore of his goodness we must praise him, else we answer not the end of the beings and blessings we have.

22 But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel. 23 Thou hast not brought me the small cattle

of thy burnt-offerings; neither hast thou honoured me with thy sacrifices. I have not caused thee to serve with an offering, nor wearied thee with incense. 24 Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices: but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities. 25 I, *even I, am* he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins. 26 Put me in remembrance: let us plead together: declare thou, that thou mayest be justified. 27 Thy first father hath sinned, and thy teachers have transgressed against me. 28 Therefore I have profaned the princes of the sanctuary, and have given Jacob to the curse, and Israel to reproaches.

This charge (and a high charge it is which is here exhibited against Jacob and Israel, God's professing people) comes in here, 1. To clear God's justice in bringing them into captivity, and to vindicate that. Were they not in covenant with him? Had they not his sanctuary among them? *Why then did the Lord deal thus with his land?* Deut. xxix. 24. Here is a good reason given: they had neglected God and had cast him off, and therefore he justly rejected them and *gave them to the curse* (v. 28); and they must be brought to own this before they are prepared for deliverance; and they did so, Dan. ix. 5; Neh. ix. 33. 2. To advance God's mercy in their deliverance and to make that appear more glorious. Many things are before observed to magnify the power of God in it; but this magnifies his goodness, that he should do such great and kind things for a people that had been so very provoking to him and were now suffering the just punishment of their iniquity. The pardoning of their sin was as great an instance of God's power (for so Moses reckons it, Num. xiv. 17, &c.) as the breaking of the yoke of their captivity. Now observe here,

I. What the sins are which they are here charged with.

1. Omissions of the good which God had commanded; and this part of the charge is here much insisted upon. Observe how it comes in with a *but*; compare v. 21, where God tells them what favours he had bestowed upon them and what his just expectations were from them. He had formed them for himself, intending they should show forth his praise. But they had not done so; they had frustrated God's expectations from them, and made very ill returns to him for his



favours. For, (1.) They had cast off prayer: *Thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob!* Jacob was a man famous for prayer (Hosea xii. 4); his seed bore his name, but did not tread in his steps, and therefore are justly upbraided with it. God takes it ill when children degenerate from the virtue and devotion of their pious ancestors. To boast of the name of Jacob, and yet live without prayer, is to mock God and deceive ourselves. If Jacob does not call upon God, who will? (2.) They had grown weary of their religion: "Thou art Israel, the seed not only of a praying but of a prevailing father, that was a prince with God; and yet, not valuing his experiences any more than his example, *thou hast been weary of me.*" They had been in relation to God, employed in his service and in communion with him; but they began to snuff at it, and to say, *Behold, what a weariness is it!* Note, Those who neglect to call upon God do in effect tell him they are weary of him and have a mind to change their Master. (3.) They grudged the expense of their devotion, and were niggardly and penurious in it. They were for a cheap religion; and in those acts of devotion that were costly they desired to be excused. They had not brought, no, not their *small cattle*, the lambs and kids, which God required for *burnt-offerings* (v. 23), much less did they bring their greater cattle, pretending they could not spare them, they must have them for the maintenance of their families. So little sense had they of the greatness of God and their obligations to him that they could not find in their hearts to part with a lamb out of their flock for his honour, though he called for it and would graciously have accepted it. *Sweet cane*, or *calamus*, was used for the holy oil, incense, and perfume; but they were not willing to be at the charge of that, v. 24. What they had must serve, though it was old and good for nothing; they would not buy fresh. Perhaps it was usual for devout pious persons to bring free-will incense as well as other free-will offerings; but they were not so generous, nor did they fill the altar of God, nor moisten it abundantly, as they should have done, *with the fat of their sacrifices*; what sacrifices they did bring were of the lean and refuse of their cattle, that had no fat in them to regale the altar with. (4.) What sacrifices they did offer they did not honour God with them, and so they were, in effect, as no sacrifices (v. 23): *Neither hast thou honoured me with thy sacrifices.* Some of them offered their sacrifices to false gods; others, who offered them to the true God, were either careless in the manner of offering them or hypocritical in their intentions, so that they might be truly said not to honour God with them, but rather to dishonour him. (5.) That which aggravated their neglect of sacrificing was that, as God had appointed it, it was no burdensome thing; it was not a service

that they had any reason at all to complain of: "*I have not caused thee to serve with an offering; I have not made it a task and drudgery to you, whatever you, through the corruption of your natures, have made it yourselves. I have not wearied thee with incense.*" None of God's commandments are grievous, no, not those concerning sacrifice and incense. They were not more costly than might be afforded by those that lived in such a plentiful country, nor did their attendance on them require any more time than they could well spare. But that which especially forbade them to call it a *wearisome service* was that they were required to be cheerful and pleasant, and to rejoice before God in all their approaches to him, Deut. xii. 12. They had many feasts and good days, but only one day in all the year in which they were to afflict their souls. The ordinances of the ceremonial law, though, in comparison with Christ's easy yoke, they are spoken of as heavy (Acts xv. 10), yet, in comparison with the service that idolaters did to their false gods, they were light, and not to be called *services* nor found fault with as wearisome. God did not require them to sacrifice their children, as Moloch did.

2. Commissions of the evil which God had forbidden; and omissions commonly make way for commissions: *Thou hast made me to serve with thy sins.* When we make God's gifts the food and fuel of our lusts, and his providence the patron of our wicked projects, especially when we encourage ourselves to continue in sin because grace has abounded, then we make God to serve with our sins. Or it may denote what a grief and burden sin is to God; it not only wearies men and makes the creation groan, but it *wearies my God also* (ch. vii. 13) and makes the Creator complain that he is *grieved* (Ps. xcv. 10), that he is *broken* (Ezek. vi. 9), that he is *pressed with sinners as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves* (Amos ii. 13), and to cry out, *Ah! I will ease me of my adversaries*, ch. i. 24. The antithesis is observable: God had not made them to serve with their sacrifices, but they had made him to serve with their sins. The master had not tired the servants with his commands, but they had tired him with their disobedience. Those are wicked servants indeed that behave so ill to so good a Master. God is tender of our comfort, but we are careless of his honour. *Let this engage us to keep close to our duty, that it is easy and reasonable, and no disparagement to us, nor too hard for us.*

II. What were the aggravations of their sin, v. 27. 1. That they were children of disobedience; for their *first father* (that is, their forefathers) *had sinned*; and they had not only sinned in their loins, but sinned like them. Ezra confesses this: *Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great*



*trespass, ch. ix. 7.* But their forefathers are called their *first father* to put us in mind of the apostasy and rebellion of our first father Adam, to which corrupt fountain we must trace up the streams of all our transgressions. 2. That they were scholars of disobedience too; for *their teachers had transgressed against God*, were guilty of gross scandalous sins, and the people, no doubt, would learn to do as they did. It is ill with a people when their leaders cause them to err, and their teachers, who should reform them, corrupt them.

III. What were the tokens of God's displeasure against them for their sins, v. 28. He brought ruin both upon church and state. 1. The honour of their church was laid in the dust and trampled on: *I have profaned the princes of the sanctuary*, that is, the priests and Levites who presided with great dignity and power in the temple-service; they profaned themselves, and made themselves vile, by their enormities, and then God profaned them and made them vile, by their calamities and the contempt they fell into, Mal. ii. 9. 2. The honour of their state was ruined likewise: "*I have given Jacob to the curse*, that is, to be cursed, and hated, and abused by all their neighbours, and *Israel to reproach*, to be insulted, ridiculed, and triumphed over by their enemies." They reproached them perhaps for that in them that was good; they *mocked at their sabbaths* (Lam. i. 7); but God gave them up to reproach, to correct them for what was amiss. Note, The dishonour which men at any time do us should humble us for the dishonour we have done to God; and we must bear it patiently because we suffer it justly, and must acknowledge that to us belongs confusion.

IV. What were the riches of God's mercy towards them notwithstanding (v. 25): *I, even I, am he* who notwithstanding all this *blotteth out thy transgressions*.

1. This gracious declaration of God's readiness to pardon sin comes in very strangely. The charge ran very high: *Thou hast wearied me with thy iniquities*, v. 24. Now one would think it should follow: "*I, even I, am he* that will destroy thee, and burden myself no longer with care about thee." No, *I, even I, am he* that will forgive thee; as if the great God would teach us that forgiving injuries is the best way to make ourselves easy and to keep ourselves from being wearied with them. This comes in here to encourage them to repent, because there is forgiveness with God, and to show the freeness of divine mercy; where sin has been exceedingly sinful grace appears exceedingly gracious. Apply this, (1.) To the forgiving of the sins of Israel as a people, in their national capacity. When God stopped the course of threatening judgments, and saved them from utter ruin, even then when he had them under severe rebukes.

then he might be said to *blot out their transgressions*. Though he corrected them, he was reconciled to them again, and did not cut them off from being a people. This he did many a time, till they rejected Christ and his gospel, which was a sin against the remedy, and then he would forgive them no more as a nation, but utterly destroyed them. (2.) To the forgiving of the sins of every particular believing penitent—*transgressions and sins*, infirmities though ever so numerous, backslidings though ever so heinous. Observe here, [1.] How the pardon is expressed; he will *blot them out*, as a cloud is blotted out by the beams of the sun (ch. xlv. 22), as a debt is blotted out not to appear against the debtor (the book is crossed as if the debt were paid, because it is pardoned upon the payment which the surety has made), or as a sentence is blotted out when it is reversed, as the curse was blotted out with the waters of jealousy, which made it of no effect to the innocent, Num. v. 23. He *will not remember the sin*, which intimates not only that he will remit the punishment of what is past, but that it shall be no diminution to his love for the future. When God forgives he forgets. [2.] What is the ground and reason of the pardon. It is not for the sake of any thing in us, but for his own sake, for his mercies'-sake, his promise-sake, and especially for his Son's sake, and that he may himself be glorified in it. [3.] How God glories in it: *I, even I, am he*. He glories in it as his prerogative. None can forgive sin but God only, and he will do it; it is his settled resolution. He will do it willingly and with delight; it is his pleasure; it is his honour; so he is pleased to reckon it.

2. Those words (v. 26), *Put me in remembrance*, may be understood either (1.) As a rebuke to a proud Pharisee, that stands upon his own justification before God, and expects to find favour for his merits and not to be beholden to free grace: "If you have any thing to say in your own justification, any thing to offer for the sake of which you should be pardoned, and not for my sake, put me in remembrance of it. I will give you leave to plead your own cause with me; declare what your merits are, that you may be justified by them:" but those who are thus challenged will be speechless. Or, (2.) As a direction and encouragement to a penitent publican. Is God thus ready to pardon sin, and, when he pardons it, will he remember it no more? Let us then put him in remembrance, mention before him those sins which he has forgiven; for they must be ever before us, to humble us, though they are pardoned, Ps. li. 3. Put him in remembrance of the promises he has made to penitents, and the satisfaction his Son has made for them. Plead these with him in wrestling for pardon, and declare these things, in order that thou mayest be justified freely by his



grace. This is the only way, and it is a sure way, to peace. *Only acknowledge thy transgression.*

## CHAP. XLIV.

God, by the prophet, goes on in this chapter, as before, I. To encourage his people with the assurance of great blessings he had in store for them at their return out of captivity, and those typical of much greater which the gospel church, his spiritual Israel, should partake of in the days of the Messiah; and hereby he proves himself to be God alone against all pretenders, ver. 1—8. II. To expose the sottishness and amazing folly of idol-makers and idol-worshippers, ver. 9—20. III. To ratify and confirm the assurances he had given to his people of those great blessings, and to raise their joyful and believing expectations of them, ver. 21—23.

**Y**ET now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen: 2 Thus saith the LORD that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, *which* will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen. 3 For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: 4 And they shall spring up *as* among the grass, as willows by the water-courses. 5 One shall say, *I am* the LORD's; and another shall call *himself* by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe *with* his hand unto the LORD, and surname *himself* by the name of Israel. 6 Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his Redeemer the LORD of hosts; *I am* the first, and *I am* the last; and beside me *there is* no God. 7 And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? And the things that are coming, and shall come, let them show unto them. 8 Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared *it*? Ye *are* even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? Yea, *there is* no God; I know not *any*.

Two great truths are abundantly made out in these verses:—

I. That the people of God are a happy people, especially upon account of the covenant that is between them and God. The people of Israel were so as a figure of the gospel Israel. Three things complete their happiness:—

1. The covenant-relations wherein they stand to God, v. 1, 2. Israel is here called *Jeshurun—the upright one*; for those only, like Nathanael, are Israelites indeed, in whom is no guile, and those only shall have

the everlasting benefit of these promises. Jacob and Israel had been represented, in the close of the foregoing chapter, as very provoking and obnoxious to God's wrath, and already given to the curse and to reproaches; but, as if God's bowels yearned towards him and his repentings were kindled together, mercy steps in with a *non-obstante—notwithstanding*, to all these quarrels: "*Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant! thou and I will be friends again for all this.*" God had said (ch. xliii. 25), *I am he that blotteth out thy transgression*, which is the only thing that creates this distance; and when that is taken away the streams of mercy run again in their former channel. The pardon of sin is the inlet of all the other blessings of the covenant. So and so I will do for them, says God (Heb. viii. 12), *for I will be merciful to their unrighteousness*. Therefore hear, O Jacob! hear these comfortable words; therefore *fear not, O Jacob!* fear not thy sins, for they are pardoned; fear not thy troubles, for by the pardon of sin the property of them too is altered. Now the relations wherein they stand to him are very encouraging. (1.) They are his *servants*; and those that serve him he will own and stand by and see that they be not wronged. (2.) They are his *chosen*, and he will abide by his choice; he knows those that are his, and those whom he has chosen he takes under special protection. (3.) They are his creatures. He *made them*, and brought them into being; he *formed them*, and cast them into shape; he began betimes with them, for he *formed them from the womb*; and therefore he will help them over their difficulties and help them in their services.

2. The covenant-blessings which he has secured to them and theirs, v. 3, 4. (1.) Those that are sensible of their spiritual wants, and the insufficiency of the creature to supply them, shall have abundant satisfaction in God: *I will pour water upon him that is thirsty*, that thirsts after righteousness; he shall be filled. Water shall be poured out to those who truly desire spiritual blessings above all the delights of sense. (2.) Those that are barren as the dry ground shall be watered with the grace of God, with floods of that grace, and God will himself give the increase. If the ground be ever so dry, God has floods of grace to water it with. (3.) The water God will pour out is *his Spirit* (John vii. 39), which God will pour out without measure upon the seed, that is, Christ (Gal. iii. 16), and by measure upon all the seed of the faithful, upon all the praying wrestling seed of Jacob, Luke xi. 13. This is the great New-Testament promise, that God, having sent his servant Christ, and upheld him, will send his Spirit to uphold us. (4.) This gift of the Holy Ghost is the great blessing God had reserved the plentiful effusion of for the latter days: *I will pour my Spirit*, that is,

*my blessing*; for where God gives his Spirit he will give all other blessings. (5.) This is reserved for the seed and offspring of the church; for so the covenant of grace runs: *I will be a God to thee and to thy seed*. To all who are thus made to partake of the privileges of adoption God will give the spirit of adoption. (6.) Hereby there shall be a great increase of the church. Thus it shall be spread to distant places. Thus it shall be propagated and perpetuated to after-times: *They shall spring up and grow as fast as willows by the watercourses*, and in every thing that is virtuous and praiseworthy shall be eminent and excel all about them, as the willows overtop the grass among which they grow, v. 4. Note, It is a great happiness to the church, and a great pleasure to good men, to see the rising generation hopeful and promising. And it will be so if God pour his Spirit upon them, that blessing, that blessing of blessings.

3. The consent they cheerfully give to their part of the covenant, v. 5. When the Jews returned out of captivity they renewed their covenant with God (Jer. i. 5), particularly that they would have no more to do with idols, Hos. xiv. 2, 3, 8. Backsliders must thus repent and do their first works. Many of those that were without did at that time join themselves to them, invited by that glorious appearance of God for them, Zech. viii. 23; Esth. viii. 17. And they say, *We are the Lord's and call themselves by the name of Jacob*; for there was one law, one covenant, *for the stranger and for those that were born in the land*. And doubtless it looks further yet, to the conversion of the Gentiles, and the multitudes of them who, upon the effusion of the Spirit, after Christ's ascension, should be *joined to the Lord and added to the church*. These converts are *one and another*, very many, of different ranks and nations, and all welcome to God, Col. iii. 11. When one does it another shall by his example be invited to do it, and then another; thus the zeal of one may provoke many. (1.) They shall resign themselves to God: not one in the name of the rest, but every one for himself shall say, "*I am the Lord's*"; he has an incontestable right to rule me, and I submit to him, to all his commands, to all his disposals. I am, and will be, his only, his wholly, his for ever, will be for his interests, will be for his praise; living and dying I will be his." (2.) They shall incorporate themselves with the people of God, *call themselves by the name of Jacob*, forgetting their own people and their fathers' house, and desirous to wear the character and livery of God's family. They shall love all God's people, shall associate with them, give them the right hand of fellowship, espouse their cause, seek the good of the church in general and of all the particular members of it, and be willing to take their lot with them in all conditions. (3.) They

shall do this very solemnly. Some of them shall *subscribe with their hand unto the Lord*, as, for the confirming of a bargain, a man sets his hand to it, and delivers it as his act and deed. The more express we are in our covenanting with God the better, Exod. xxiv. 7; Josh. xxiv. 26, 27; Neh. ix. 38. Fast bind, fast find.

II. That, as the Israel of God are a happy people, so the God of Israel is a great God, and he is God alone. This also, as the former, speaks abundant satisfaction to all that trust in him, v. 6—8. Observe here, to God's glory and our comfort, 1. That the God we trust in is a God of incontestable sovereignty and irresistible power. He is *the Lord*, Jehovah, self-existent and self-sufficient; and he is *the Lord of hosts*, of all the hosts of heaven and earth, of angels and men. 2. That he stands in relation to, and has a particular concern for, his church. He is *the King of Israel and his Redeemer*; therefore his Redeemer because his King; and those that take God for their King shall have him for their Redeemer. When God would assert himself God alone he proclaims himself Israel's God, that his people may be encouraged both to adhere to him and to triumph in him. 3. That he is eternal—the *first and the last*. He is God from everlasting, before the worlds were, and will be so to everlasting, when the world shall be no more. If there were not a God to create, nothing would ever have been; and, if there were not a God to uphold, all would soon come to nothing again. He is all in all, is the first cause, from whom are all things, and the last end, to and for whom are all things (Rom. xi. 36), the *Alpha and the Omega*, Rev. i. 11. 4. That he is God alone (v. 6): *Besides me there is no God. Is there a God besides me?* v. 8. We will appeal to the greatest scholars. Did they ever in all their reading meet with any other? To those that have had the largest acquaintance with the world. Did they ever meet with any other? There are *gods many* (1 Cor. viii. 5, 6), *called gods*, and counterfeit gods; but is there any besides our God that is infinite and eternal, any besides him that is the creator of the world and the protector and benefactor of the whole creation, any besides him that can do that for their worshippers which he can and will do for his? "*You are my witnesses*. I have been a nonsuch to you. You have tried other gods; have you found any of them all-sufficient to you, or any of them like me? *Yea, there is no god, no rock* (so the word is), none besides Jehovah that can be a rock for a foundation to build on, a rock for shelter to flee to. God is the rock, and *their rock is not as ours*, Deut. xxxii. 4, 31. *I know not any*; as if he had said, "I never met with any that offered to stand in competition with me, or that durst bring their pretensions to a fair trial; if I did know of any that could be-



friend you better than I can, I would recommend you to them; but I know not any." There is no God besides Jehovah. He is infinite, and therefore there can be no other; he is all-sufficient, and therefore there needs no other. This is designed for the confirming of the hopes of God's people in the promise of their deliverance out of Babylon, and, in order to that, for the curing of them of their idolatry; when the affliction had done its work it should be removed. They are reminded of the first and great article of their creed, that *the Lord their God is one Lord*, Deut. vi. 4. And therefore, (1.) They needed not to hope in any other god. Those on whom the sun shines need neither moon nor stars, nor the light of their own fire. (2.) They needed not to fear any other god. Their own God was more able to do them good than all the false and counterfeit gods of their enemies were to do them hurt. 5. That none besides could foretell these things to come, which God now by his prophet gave notice of to the world, above 200 years before they came to pass (v. 7): "*Who, as I, shall call, shall call Cyrus to Babylon, shall call Israel out of Babylon? Is there any but God that can call effectually, and has every creature, every heart, at his beck? Who shall declare it, how it shall be, and by whom, as I do?*" Nay, God goes further; he not only sees it in order, as having the foreknowledge of it, but *sets it in order*, as having the sole management and direction of it. Can any other pretend to this? He has always set things in order according to the counsel of his own will, ever *since he appointed the ancient people*, the people of Israel, who could give a truer and fuller account of the antiquities of their own nation than any other kingdom in the world could give of theirs. Ever since he appointed that people to be his peculiar people his providence was particularly conversant about them, and he told them beforehand the events that should occur respecting them—their bondage in Egypt, their deliverance from it, and their settlement in Canaan. All was set in order in the divine predictions as well as in the divine purposes. Could any other have done so? Would any other have been so far concerned for them? He challenges the pretenders to show the things that shall come hereafter: "Let them, if they can, tell us the name of the man that shall destroy Babylon and deliver Israel? Nay, if they cannot pretend to tell us *the things that shall come hereafter*, let them tell us the things that *are coming*, that are nigh at hand and at the door. Let them tell us what shall come to pass to-morrow; but they cannot do that; fear them not therefore, nor be afraid of them. What harm can they do you? What hindrance can they give to your deliverance, when I have told thee it shall be accomplished in its season,

and I have solemnly declared it?" Note, Those who have the word of God's promise to depend upon need not be afraid of any adverse powers or policies whatsoever

9 They that make a graven image are all of them vanity; and their delectable things shall not profit; and they are their own witnesses; they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed. 10 Who hath formed a god, or molten a graven image that is profitable for nothing? 11 Behold, all his fellows shall be ashamed: and the workmen, they are of men: let them all be gathered together, let them stand up; yet they shall fear, and they shall be ashamed together. 12 The smith with the tongs both worketh in the coals, and fashioneth it with hammers, and worketh it with the strength of his arms: yea, he is hungry, and his strength faileth: he drinketh no water, and is faint. 13 The carpenter stretcheth out his rule; he marketh it out with a line; he fitteth it with planes, and he marketh it out with the compass, and maketh it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man; that it may remain in the house. 14 He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak, which he strengtheneth for himself among the trees of the forest: he planteth an ash, and the rain doth nourish it. 15 Then shall it be for a man to burn: for he will take thereof, and warm himself; yea, he kindleth it, and baketh bread; yea, he maketh a god, and worshippeth it; he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto. 16 He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast, and is satisfied: yea, he warmeth himself, and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire: 17 And the residue thereof he marketh a god, *even* his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my god. 18 They have not known nor understood: for he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see; and their hearts, that they cannot under-

stand. 19 And none considereth in his heart, neither *is there* knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire; yea, also I have baked bread upon the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh, and eaten *it*: and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? Shall I fall down to the stock of a tree? 20 He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, *Is there* not a lie in my right hand?

Often before, God, by the prophet, had mentioned the folly and strange sottishness of idolaters; but here he enlarges upon that head, and very fully and particularly exposes them to contempt and ridicule. This discourse is intended, 1. To arm the people of Israel against the strong temptation they would be in to worship idols when they were captives in Babylon, in compliance with the custom of the country (they being far from the city of their own solemnities) and to humour those who were now their lords and masters. 2. To cure them of their inclination to idolatry, which was the sin that did most easily beset them and to reform them from which they were sent into Babylon. As the rod of God is of use to enforce the word, so the word of God is of use to explain the rod, that the voice of both together may be heard and answered. 3. To furnish them with something to say to their Chaldean task-masters. When they insulted over them, when they asked, *Where is your God?* they might hence ask them, *What are your gods?* 4. To take off their fear of the gods of their enemies, and to encourage their hope in their own God that he would certainly appear against those who set up such scandalous competitors as these with him for the throne.

Now here, for the conviction of idolaters, we have,

I. A challenge given to them to clear themselves, if they can, from the imputation of the most shameful folly and senselessness imaginable, v. 9—11. They set their wits on work to contrive, and their hands on work to frame, graven images, and they call them *their delectable things*; extremely fond they are of them, and mighty things they expect from them. Note, Through the corruption of men's nature, those things that should be detestable to them are desirable and delectable; but those are far gone in a distemper to whom that which is the food and fuel of it is most agreeable. Now, 1. We tell them that those that do so are all vanity; they deceive themselves and one another, and put a great cheat upon those for whom they make these images. 2. We tell them that *their delectable things shall not profit*

them, nor make them any return for the pleasure they take in them; they can neither supply them with good nor protect them from evil. The *graven images* are *profitable for nothing* at all, nor will they ever get any thing by the *devoirs* they pay to them.

3. We appeal to themselves whether it be not a silly sottish thing to expect any good from gods of their own making: *They are their own witnesses*, witnesses against themselves, if they would but give their own consciences leave to deal faithfully with them, that they are blind and ignorant in doing thus. *They see not nor know*, and let them own it, *that they may be ashamed*. If men would but be true to their own convictions, ordinarily we might be sure of their conversion, particularly idolaters; for *who has formed a god?* Who but a madman, or one out of his wits, would think of forming a god, of making that which, if he make it a god, he must suppose to be his maker? 4. We challenge them to plead their own cause with any confidence or assurance. If any one has the front to say that he has formed a god, when all his fellows come together to declare what each of them has done towards the making of this god, they will all be ashamed of the cheat they have put upon themselves, and laugh in their sleeves at those whom they have imposed upon; for *the workmen* that formed this god *are of men*, weak and impotent, and therefore cannot possibly make a being that shall be omnipotent, nor can they without blushing pretend to do so. *Let them all be gathered together*, as Demetrius and the craftsmen were, to support their sinking trade; *let them stand up* to plead their own cause, and make the best they can of it, with hand joined in hand; *yet they shall fear* to undertake it when it comes to the setting to, as conscious to themselves of the weakness and badness of their cause, and *they shall be ashamed* of it, not only when they appear singly, but when by appearing together they hope to keep one another in countenance. Note, Idolatry and impiety are things which men may justly both tremble and blush to appear in the defence of.

II. A particular narrative of the whole proceeding in making a god; and there needs no more to expose it than to describe it and tell the story of it.

1. The persons employed about it are handicraft tradesmen, the meanest of them, the very same that you would employ in making the common utensils of your husbandry, a cart or a plough. You must have a *smith*, a blacksmith, who *with the tongs works in the coals*; and it is hard work, for he *works with the strength of his arms*, till he is hungry and his strength fails, so eager is he, and so hasty are those who set him at the work to get it despatched. He cannot allow himself time to eat or drink, for *he drinks no water*, and therefore is faint, v. 12.



Perhaps it was a piece of superstition among them for the workman not to eat or drink while he was making a god. The plates with which the smith was to cover the image, or whatever iron-work was to be done about it, *he fashioned with hammers*, and made it all very exact, according to the model given him. Then comes *the carpenter*, and he takes as much care and pains about the timber-work, *v. 13*. He brings his box of tools, for he has occasion for them all: *He stretches out his rule* upon the piece of wood, *marks it with a line*, where it must be sawed or cut off; *he fits it*, or polishes it, *with planes*, the greater first and then the less; *he marks out with the compasses* what must be the size and shape of it; and it is just what he pleases.

2. The form in which it is made is that of a man, a poor, weak, dying creature; but it is the noblest form and figure that he is acquainted with, and, being his own, he has a peculiar fondness for it and is willing to put all the reputation he can upon it. He makes it *according to the beauty of a man*, in comely proportion, with those limbs and lineaments that are the beauty of a man, but are altogether unfit to represent the beauty of the Lord. God put a great honour upon man when, in respect of the powers and faculties of his soul, he made him after the image of God; but man does a great dishonour to God when he makes him, in respect of bodily parts and members, after the image of man. Nor will it at all atone for the affront so far to compliment his god as to take the fairest of the children of men for his original whence to take his copy, and to give him all the beauty of a man that he can think of; for all the *beauty of the body of a man*, when pretended to be put upon him who is an infinite Spirit, is a deformity and diminution to him. And, when the goodly piece is finished, it must *remain in the house*, in the temple or shrine prepared for it, or perhaps in the dwelling house if it be one of the *lares* or *penates*—the household gods.

3. The matter of which it is mostly made is sorry stuff to make a god of; it is the stock of a tree.

(1.) The tree itself was fetched out of the forest, where it grew among other trees, of no more virtue or value than its neighbours. It was a *cedar*, it may be, or a *cypress*, or an *oak*, *v. 14*. Perhaps he had an eye upon it some time before for this use, and *strengthened it for himself*, used some art or other to make it stronger and better-grown than other trees were. Or, as some read it, *which hath strengthened or lifted up itself among the trees of the forest*, the tallest and strongest he can pick out. Or, it may be, it pleases his fancy better to take an *ash*, which is of a quicker growth, and which was of his own planting for this use, and which has been nourished with rain from

heaven. See what a fallacy he puts upon himself, in making that his refuge which was of his own planting, and which he not only gave the form to, but prepared the matter for; and what an affront he puts upon the God of heaven in setting up that as a rival with him which was nourished by his rain, that rain which falls upon the just and unjust.

(2.) The boughs of this tree were good for nothing but for fuel; to that use were they put, and so were the chips that were cut off from it in the working of it; they are *for a man to burn*, *v. 15, 16*. To show that that tree has no innate virtue in it for its own protection, it is as capable of being burnt as any other tree; and, to show that he who chose it had no more antecedent value for it than for any other tree, he makes no difficulty of throwing part of it into the fire as common rubbish, asking no question for conscience' sake. [1.] It serves him for his parlour-fire: *He will take thereof and warm himself* (*v. 15*), and he finds the comfort of it, and is so far from having any regret in his mind for it that he saith, *Aha! I am warm; I have seen the fire*; and certainly that part of the tree which served him for fuel, the use for which God and nature designed it, does him a much greater kindness and yields him more satisfaction than ever that will which he makes a god of. [2.] It serves him for his kitchen-fire: *He eats flesh* with it, that is, he dresses the flesh with it which he is to eat; *he roasteth roast, and is satisfied* that he has not done amiss to put it to this use. Nay, [3.] It serves him to heat the oven with, in which we use that fuel which is of least value: *He kindles it and bakes bread* with the heat of it, and none charges him with doing wrong.

(3.) Yet, after all, the stock or body of the tree shall serve to make a god of, when it might as well have served to make a bench, as one of themselves, even a poet of their own, upbraids them, *Horat. Sat. i. 8*:

Olim truncus eram ficulnus, inutile lignum,  
Quum faber, incertus scannum faceretne Priapum.  
Maluit esse deum; deus inde ego—

In days of yore our godship stood  
A very worthless log of wood,  
The joiner, doubting or to shape us  
Into a stool or a Priapus,  
At length resolved, for reasons wise,  
Into a god to bid me rise. FRANCIS.

And another of them threatens the idol to whom he had committed the custody of his woods that, if he did not preserve them to be fuel for his fire, he should himself be made use of for that purpose:

Furaces moneo manus repellas,  
Et silvam domini foci reserves,  
Si defecerit hæc, et ipse lignum es.

Drive the plunderers away, and preserve the wood for thy master's hearth, or thou thyself shalt be converted into fuel.—MARTIAL.

When the besotted idolater has thus served the meanest purposes with part of his tree, and the rest has had time to season (he makes that a god in his imagination while that is in the doing, *and worships it*): He makes it a graven image, and falls down thereto (v. 15), that is (v. 17), *The residue thereof he makes a god, even his graven image*, according to his fancy and intention; he falls down to it, and worships it, gives divine honours to it, prostrates himself before it in the most humble reverent posture, as a servant, as a suppliant; he prays to it, as having a dependence upon it, and great expectations from it; he saith, *Deliver me, for thou art my god*. There where he pays his homage and allegiance he justly looks for protection and deliverance. What a strange infatuation is this, to expect help from gods that cannot help themselves! But it is this praying to them that makes them gods, not what the smith or the carpenter did to them. What we place our confidence in for deliverance that we make a god of.

Qui fingit sacros, auro vel marmore, vultus

Non facit ille deos; qui rogat, ille facit.

He who supplicates the figure, whether it be of gold or of marble, makes it a god, and not he who merely constructs it.—MARTIAL.

III. Here is judgment given upon this whole matter, v. 18—20. In short, it is the effect and evidence of the greatest stupidity and sottishness that one could ever imagine rational beings to be guilty of, and shows that man has become worse than the beasts that perish; for they act according to the dictates of sense, but man acts not according to the dictates of reason (v. 18): *They have not known nor understood common sense*; men that act rationally in other things in this act most absurdly. Though they have some knowledge and understanding, yet they are strangers to, nay, they are rebels against the great law of consideration (v. 12): *None considers in his heart*, nor has so much application of mind as to reason thus with himself, which one would think he might easily do, though there were none to reason with him: “*I have burnt part of this tree in the fire, for baking and roasting; and now shall I make the residue thereof an abomination?* (that is, *an idol*, for that is an abomination to God and all wise and good men); “shall I ungratefully choose to do, or presumptuously dare to do, what the Lord hates? shall I be such a fool as to fall down to the stock of a tree—a senseless, lifeless, helpless thing? shall I so far disparage myself, and make myself like that I bow down to?” A growing tree may be a beautiful stately thing, but the stock of a tree has lost its glory, and he has lost his that gives glory to it. Upon the whole, the sad character given of these idolaters is, 1. That they put a cheat upon themselves (v. 20): *They feed on ashes*; they feed themselves with hopes of advantage by worshipping these idols, but

they will be disappointed as much as a man that would expect nourishment by feeding on ashes. Feeding on ashes is an evidence of a depraved appetite and a distempered body; and it is a sign that the soul is overpowered by very bad habits when men, in their worship, go no further than the sight of their eyes will carry them. They are wretchedly deluded, and it is their own fault: *A deceived heart* of their own, more than the deceiving tongue of others, *has turned them aside* from the faith and worship of the living God to dumb idols. They are drawn away of their own lusts and enticed. The apostasy of sinners from God is owing entirely to themselves and to the evil heart of unbelief that is in their own bosom. A revolting and rebellious heart is a deceived heart. 2. That they wilfully persist in their self-delusion and will not be undeceived. There is none of them that can be persuaded so far to suspect himself as to say, *Is there not a lie in my right hand?* and so to think of delivering his soul. Note, (1.) Idolaters have a lie in their right hand; for an idol is a lie, is not what it pretends, performs not what it promises, and it is a *teacher of lies*, Hab. ii. 18. (2.) It highly concerns those that are secure in an evil way seriously to consider whether there be not a lie in their right hand. Is not that a lie which with complacency we hold fast as our chief good? Are our hearts set upon the wealth of the world and the pleasures of sense? They will certainly prove a lie in our right hand. And is not that a lie which with confidence we hold fast by, as the ground on which we build our hopes for heaven? If we trust to our external professions and performances, as if those would save us, we deceive ourselves with a lie in our right hand, with a house built on the sand. (3.) Self-suspicion is the first step towards self-deliverance. We cannot be faithful to ourselves unless we are jealous of ourselves. He that would deliver his soul must begin with putting this question to his own conscience, *Is there not a lie in my right hand?* (4.) Those that are given up to believe in a lie are under the power of strong delusions, which it is hard to get clear of, 2 Thes. ii. 11.

21 Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for thou art my servant: I have formed thee; thou art my servant: O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me. 22 I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee. 23 Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the Lord



hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel. 24 Thus saith the LORD, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, *I am the LORD that maketh all things*; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself; 25 That frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise *men* backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish; 26 That confirmeth the word of his servant, and performeth the counsel of his messengers; that saith to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited; and to the cities of Judah, Ye shall be built, and I will raise up the decayed places thereof: 27 That saith to the deep, Be dry, and I will dry up thy rivers: 28 That saith of Cyrus, *He is my shepherd*, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.

In these verses we have,

I. The duty which Jacob and Israel, now in captivity, were called to, that they might be qualified and prepared for the deliverance designed them. Our first care must be to get good by our afflictions, and then we may hope to get out of them. The duty is expressed in two words: *Remember and return*, as in the counsel to Ephesus, Rev. ii. 4, 5. 1. "*Remember these, O Jacob! Remember what thou hast been told of the folly of idolatry, and let the convictions thou art now under be ready to thee whenever thou art tempted to that sin. Remember that thou art my servant, and therefore must not serve other masters.*" 2. *Return unto me*, v. 22. It is the great concern of those who have backslidden from God to hasten their return to him; and this is that which he calls them to when they are in affliction, and when he is returning to them in a way of mercy.

II. The favours which Jacob and Israel, now in captivity, were assured of; and what is here promised to them upon their remembering and returning to God is in a spiritual sense promised to all that in like manner return to God. It is a very comfortable word, for more is implied in it than is expressed (v. 21): "*O Israel! thou shalt not be forgotten of me, though for the present thou seemest to be so.*" When we begin to remember God he will begin to remember us; nay, it is he that remembers us first. Now observe here,

1. The grounds upon which God's favour-

able intentions to his people were built and on which they might build their expectations from him. He will deliver them out of captivity; for, (1.) They are his servants, and therefore he has a just quarrel with those that detain them. *Let my people go, that they may serve me.* The servants of the King of kings are under special protection. (2.) He formed them into a people, formed them *from the womb*, v. 24. From the first beginning of their increase into a nation they were under his particular care and government, more than any other people; their national constitution was of his framing, and his covenant with them was the charter by which they were incorporated. They are his, and he will save them. (3.) He has redeemed them formerly, has many a time redeemed them out of great distress, and he is still the same, in the same relation to them, has the same concern for them. "*Therefore return unto me, for I have redeemed thee*, v. 22. Whither wilt thou go, but to me?" Having redeemed them, as well as formed them, he has acquired a further title to them and propriety in them, which is a good reason why they should dutifully return to him and why he will graciously return to them. The Lord has redeemed Jacob; he is about to do it (v. 23); he has determined to do it; for he is the Lord their Redeemer, v. 24. Note, The work of redemption which God has by his Son wrought for us encourages us to hope for all promised blessings from him. He that has redeemed us at so vast an expence will not lose his purchase. (4.) He has glorified himself in them (v. 23), and therefore will do so still, John xii. 28. It is matter of comfort to us to see God's glory interested in the deliverances of the church; for *therefore* he will certainly redeem Jacob, because thus he will glorify himself. And *this* assures us that he will perfect the redemption of his saints by Jesus Christ, because there is a day set when he will be glorified and admired in them all. (5.) He has pardoned their sins, which were the cause of their calamity and the only obstruction to their deliverance, v. 22. *Therefore* he will break the yoke of captivity from off their necks, because he has *blotted out, as a thick cloud, their transgressions*. Note, [1.] Our transgressions and our sins are as a cloud, a thick cloud; they interpose between heaven and earth, and for a time suspend and intercept the correspondence between the upper and lower world (*sin separates between us and God*, ch. lix. 2); they threaten a storm, a deluge of wrath, as thick clouds do, which God will rain upon sinners, Ps. xi. 6. [2.] When God pardons sin he blots out this cloud, this thick cloud, so that the intercourse with heaven is laid open again. God looks down upon the soul with favour; the soul looks up to him with pleasure. The cloud is scattered by the influence of the

Sun of righteousness. It is only through Christ that sin is pardoned. When sin is pardoned, like a cloud that is scattered, it appears no more, it is quite gone. *The iniquity of Jacob shall be sought for, and not found*, Jer 1. 20. And the comforts that flow into the soul when sin is pardoned are like the *clear shining after clouds and rain*.

2. The universal joy which the deliverance of God's people should bring along with it (v. 23): *Sing, O you heavens!* This intimates, (1.) That the whole creation shall have cause for joy and rejoicing in the redemption of God's people; to that it is owing that it subsists (that it is rescued from the curse which the sin of man brought upon the ground) and that it is again put into a capacity of answering the ends of its being, and is assured that though now it groans, being burdened, it shall at last be delivered from the bondage of corruption. The greatest establishment of the world is the kingdom of God in it, Ps. xcvi. 11—13; xcvi. 7—9. (2.) That the angels shall rejoice in it, and the inhabitants of the upper world. The heavens shall sing, for the Lord has done it. And there is joy in heaven when God and man are reconciled (Luke xv. 7), joy when Babylon falls, Rev. xviii. 20. (3.) That those who lay at the greatest distance, even the inhabitants of the Gentile world, should join in these praises, as sharing in these joys. *The lower parts of the earth, the forest and the trees there, shall bring in the tribute of thanksgiving for the redemption of Israel*.

3. The encouragement we have to hope that though great difficulties, and such as have been thought insuperable, lie in the way of the church's deliverance, yet, when the time for it shall come, they shall all be got over with ease; for *thus saith Israel's Redeemer, I am the Lord that maketh all things*, did make them at first and am still making them; for providence is a continued creation. All being, power, life, motion, and perfection, are from God. He *stretches forth the heavens alone*, has no help nor needs any; and the earth too he *spreads abroad by himself*, and by his own power. Man was not by him when he did it (Job xxxviii. 4), nor did any creature advise or assist; only his own eternal wisdom and Word was by him then as *one brought up with him*, Prov. viii. 30. His stretching out the heavens by himself denotes the boundless extent of his power. The strongest man, if he has to stretch a thing out, must get somebody or other to lend a hand; but God stretched out the vast expanse, and keeps it still upon the stretch, himself, by his own power. Let not Israel be discouraged then; nothing is too hard for him to do that made the world, Ps. cxiv. 8. And, having made all things, he can make what use he pleases of all, and has it in his power to serve his own purposes by them.

4. The confusion which this would put upon the oracles of Babylon, by the confutation it would give them, v. 25. God, by delivering his people out of Babylon, would *frustrate the tokens of the liars*, of all the lying prophets, that said the Babylonian monarchy had many ages yet to live, and pretended to ground their predictions upon some token, some sign or other, which, according to the rules of their art, foreboded its prosperity. How mad will these conjurers grow with vexation when they see that their skill fails them, and that the contrary happens to that which they so coveted and were so confident of. Nor would it only baffle their pretended prophets, but their celebrated politicians too: *He turns the wise men backward*. Finding they cannot go on with their projects, they are forced to quit them; and so he makes the judges fools, and makes their knowledge foolish. Those that are made acquainted with Christ see all the knowledge they had before to be foolishness in comparison with the knowledge of him. And those that are adversaries to him will find all their counsels, like Ahithophel's, turned into foolishness, and themselves taken in their own craftiness, 1 Cor. iii. 19.

5. The confirmation which this would give to the oracles of God, which the Jews had distrusted and their enemies despised. *God confirms the word of his servant* (v. 26); he confirms it by accomplishing it in its season; and *performs the counsel of the messengers* whom he hath many a time sent to his people, to tell them what great blessings he had in store for them. Note, The exact fulfilling of the prophecies of scripture is a confirmation of the truth of the whole book and an incontestable evidence of its divine origin and authority.

6. The particular favours God designed for his people, that were now in captivity, v. 26—28. These were foretold long before they went into captivity, that they might see reason to expect a correction, but no reason to fear a final destruction. (1.) It is here supposed that Jerusalem, and the cities of Judah, should for a time lie in ruins, depopled and uninhabited; but it is promised that they shall be rebuilt and re-peopled. When Isaiah lived, Jerusalem and the cities of Judah were full of inhabitants; but they will be emptied, burnt, and destroyed. It was then hard to believe that concerning such strong and populous cities. But the justice of God will do that; and, when that is done, it will be hard to believe that ever they will recover themselves again, and yet the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do that too. God has said to Jerusalem, *Thou shalt be inhabited*; for, while the world stands, God will have a church in it, and therefore he will raise up those who *shall say to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built*; for, if it be not built, it cannot be inhabited, Ps. lxi. 35, 36. When God's



time shall have come for the building up of his church, let him alone to find both houses for his people (for they shall not lie exposed) and people for his houses, for they shall not stand empty. The cities of Judah too shall again be built. The Assyrian army under Sennacherib only took them, and then, upon the defeat of that army, they returned undamaged to the right owners; but the Chaldean army demolished them, and by carrying away the inhabitants left them to go to decay of themselves; for, if less judgments prevail not to humble and reform men, God will send greater. Yet these desolations shall not be perpetual. God will *raise up the wastes and decayed places thereof*; for he will not contend for ever. The city of strangers, when it is ruined, shall never be built (*ch. xxv. 2*), but the city of God's own children is but discontinued for a time. (2.) It is here supposed that the temple too should be destroyed, and lie for a time razed to the foundations; but it is promised that the foundation of it shall again be laid, and no doubt built upon. As the desolation of the sanctuary was to all the pious Jews the most mournful part of the destruction, so the restoration and re-establishment of it would be the most joyful part of the deliverance. What joy can they have in the rebuilding of Jerusalem if the temple there be not rebuilt? for it is that which makes it a holy city and truly beautiful. This therefore was the chief thing that the Jews had at heart and had in view in their return; therefore they would go back to Jerusalem, to *build the house of the Lord God of Israel* there, *Ezra i. 3*. (3.) It is here supposed that very great difficulties would lie in the way of this deliverance, which it would be impossible for them to wade through; but it is promised that by a divine power they shall all be removed (*v. 27*): *God saith to the deep, Be dry*; so he did when he brought Israel out of Egypt, and so he will again when he brings them out of Babylon, if there be occasion. *Who art thou, O great mountain?* Dost thou stand in the way? Before Zerubbabel, the commander-in-chief of the returning captives, *thou shalt become a plain*, *Zech. iv. 7*. So, *Who art thou, O great deep?* Dost thou retard their passage and think to block it up? Thou shalt be dry, and thy rivers that supply thee shall be dried up. When Cyrus took Babylon by draining the river Euphrates into many channels, and so making it passable for his army, this was fulfilled. Note, Whatever obstructions lie in the way of Israel's redemption, God can remove them with a word's speaking. (4.) It is here supposed that none of the Jews themselves would be able by might and power to force their way out of Babylon; but it is promised that God will raise up a stranger from afar off, that shall fairly open the way for them, and now at length he names the very man, many

scores of years before he was born or thought of (*v. 28*): *That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd*. Israel is his people, and the sheep of his pasture. These sheep are now in the midst of wolves, in the hands of the thief and robber; they are impounded for trespass. Now Cyrus shall be his shepherd, employed by him to release these sheep, and to take care of their return to their own green pastures again. "In this *he shall perform all my pleasure*, shall bring about what is purposed by me and will be highly pleasing to me." Note, [1.] The most contingent things are certain to the divine prescience. He knew who was the person, and what was his name, that should be the deliverer of his people, and, when he pleased, he could let his church know it, that, when they heard of such a name beginning to be talked of in the world, they might *lift up their heads with joy, knowing that their redemption drew nigh*. [2.] It is the greatest honour of the greatest men to be employed for God as instruments of his favour to his people. It was more the praise of Cyrus to be God's shepherd than to be emperor of Persia. [3.] God makes what use he pleases of men, of mighty men, of those that act with the greatest freedom; and, when they think to do as they please, he can overrule them, and make them do as he pleases. Nay, in those very things wherein they are serving themselves, and look no further than that, God is serving his own purposes by them and making them to perform all his pleasure. Rich princes shall do what poor prophets have foretold.

## CHAP. XLV.

Cyrus was nominated, in the foregoing chapter, to be God's shepherd; more is said to him and more of him in this chapter, not only because he was to be instrumental in the release of the Jews out of their captivity, but because he was to be therein a type of the great Redeemer, and that release was to be typical of the great redemption from sin and death; for that was the salvation of which all the prophets witnessed. We have here, I. The great things which God would do for Cyrus, that he might be put into a capacity to release God's people, *ver. 1-4*. II. The proof God would hereby give of his eternal power and godhead, and his universal, incontestable, sovereignty, *ver. 5-7*. III. A prayer for the hastening of this deliverance, *ver. 8*. IV. A check to the unbelieving Jews, who quarrelled with God for the lengthening out of their captivity, *ver. 9, 10*. V. Encouragement given to the believing Jews, who trusted in God and continued instant in prayer, assuring them that God would in due time accomplish this work by the hand of Cyrus, *ver. 11-15*. VI. A challenge given to the worshippers of idols and their doom read, and satisfaction given to the worshippers of the true God and their comfort secured, with an eye to the Mediator, who is made of God to us both righteousness and sanctification, *ver. 16-25*. And here, as in many other parts of this prophecy, there is much of Christ and of gospel grace.

**T**HUS saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two-leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; 2 I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder



the bars of iron: 3 And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call *thee* by thy name, *am* the God of Israel. 4 For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.

Cyrus was a Mede, descended (as some say) from Astyages king of Media. The pagan writers are not agreed in their accounts of his origin. Some tell us that in his infancy he was an outcast, left exposed, and was saved from perishing by a herdsman's wife. However, it is agreed that, being a man of an active genius, he soon made himself very considerable, especially when Cræsus king of Lydia made a descent upon his country, which he not only repulsed, but revenged, prosecuting the advantages he had gained against Cræsus with such vigour that in a little time he took Sardis and made himself master of the rich kingdom of Lydia and the many provinces that then belonged to it. This made him very great (for Cræsus was rich to a proverb) and enabled him to pursue his victories in many countries; but it was nearly ten years afterwards that, in conjunction with his uncle Darius and with the forces of Persia, he made this famous attack upon Babylon, which is here foretold, and which we have the history of Dan. v. Babylon had now grown exorbitantly rich and strong. It was forty-five miles in compass (some say more): the walls were thirty-two feet thick and 100 cubits high. Some say, They were so thick that six chariots might drive abreast upon them; others say, They were fifty cubits thick and 200 high. Cyrus seems to have had a great ambition to make himself master of this place, and to have projected it long; and at last he performed it. Now here, 210 years before it came to pass, we are told,

I. What great things God would do for him, that he might put it into his power to release his people. In order to this he shall be a mighty conqueror and a wealthy monarch, and nations shall become tributaries to him and help him both with men and money. Now that which God here promised to do for Cyrus he could have done for Zerubbabel, or some of the Jews themselves; but the wealth and power of this world God has seldom seen fit to entrust his own people with much of, so many are the snares and temptations that attend them; but if there has been occasion, for the good of the church, to make use of them, God has been pleased rather to put them into the hands of others, to be employed for

them, than to venture them in their own hands. Cyrus is here called God's *anointed*, because he was both designed and qualified for this great service by the counsel of God, and was to be herein a type of the Messiah. God engages to hold his right hand, not only to strengthen and sustain him, but to direct his motions and intentions, as Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands when he was to shoot his arrow against Syria, 2 Kings xiii. 16. Being under such direction,

1. He shall extend his conquests very far and shall make nothing of the opposition that will be given him. Babylon is too strong a place for a young hero to begin with; and therefore, that he may be able to deal with that, great additions shall be made to his strength by other conquests. (1. *Populous kingdoms shall yield to him.* God will *subdue nations before him*; when he is in the full career of his successes he shall make nothing of a nation's being born to him at once: yet it is not he that subdues them; it is God that subdues them for him; the battle is his, and therefore his is the victory. (2.) *Potent kings shall fall before him: I will loose the loins of kings*, either the girdle of their loins (divesting them of their power and dignity) or the strength of their loins, and then it was literally fulfilled in Belshazzar, for, when he was terrified by the handwriting on the wall, *the joints of his loins were loosed*, Dan. v. 6. (3.) *Great cities shall surrender themselves into his hands*, without giving him or themselves any trouble. God will incline the keepers of the city to *open before him the two-leaved gates*, not treacherously nor timorously, but from a full conviction that it is to no purpose to contend with him; and therefore the gates shall not be shut to keep him out as an enemy, but thrown open to admit him as a friend. (4.) *The longest and most dangerous marches shall be made easy and ready to him: I will go before thee*, to clear the way, and to conduct thee in it, and then the *crooked places shall be made straight*; or, as some read it, the hilly places shall be levelled and made even. Those will find a ready road that have God going before them. (5.) *No opposition shall stand before him.* He that gives him his commission *will break in pieces the gates of brass* that are shut against him, and *cut asunder the bars of iron* wherewith they are fastened. This was fulfilled in the letter, if that be true which Herodotus reports, that the city of Babylon had 100 gates all of brass, with posts and hooks of the same metal.

2. He shall replenish his coffers very much (v. 3): *I will give thee the treasures of darkness*, treasures of gold and silver, that have been long kept close under lock and key and had not seen the light of many years, or had been buried under ground by the inhabitants, in their fright, upon the taking of the city. The riches of many



nations had been brought to Babylon, and Cyrus seized all together. *The hidden riches of secret places*, which belonged either to the crown or to private persons, shall all be a prey to Cyrus. Thus God, designing him to do a piece of service to his church, paid him richly for it beforehand; and Cyrus very honestly owned God's goodness to him, and, in consideration of that, released the captives. Ezra i. 2, *God has given me all the kingdoms of the earth* and thereby has obliged me to build him a house at Jerusalem.

II. We are here told what God designed in doing all this for Cyrus. What Cyrus aimed at in undertaking his wars we may easily guess; but what God aimed at in giving him such wonderful success in his wars we are here told.

1. It was that the God of Israel might be glorified: "*That thou mayest know by all this that I the Lord am the God of Israel; for I have called thee by thy name long before thou wast born.*" When Cyrus should have this prophecy of Isaiah shown to him, and should there find his own name and his own achievements particularly described so long before, he should thereby be brought to acknowledge that the God of Israel was the Lord, Jehovah, the only living and true God, and that he continued to own his Israel though now in captivity. It is well when thus men's prosperity brings them to the knowledge of God, for too often it makes them forget him.

2. It was that the Israel of God might be released, v. 4. Cyrus knew not God as the God of Israel. Having been trained up in the worship of idols, the true God was to him an unknown God. But, though he knew not God, God not only knew him when he came into being, but foreknew him, and bespoke him for his shepherd. He called him by his name, *Cyrus*, nay, which was yet a greater honour, he surnamed him and called him his *anointed*. And why did God do all this for Cyrus? Not for his own sake, be it known to him; whether he was a man of virtue or no is questioned. Xenophon indeed, when he would describe the heroic virtues of an excellent prince, made use of Cyrus's name, and many of the particulars of his story, in his *Cyropædia*; but other historians represent him as haughty, cruel, and blood-thirsty. The reason why God preferred him was *for Jacob his servant's sake*. Note, (1.) In all the revolutions of states and kingdoms, the sudden falls of the great and strong, and the surprising advancements of the weak and obscure, God is designing the good of his church. (2.) It is therefore the wisdom of those to whom God has given wealth and power to use them for his glory, by showing kindness to his people. Cyrus is preferred that Israel may be released. He shall have a kingdom, only that God's people may have their liberty; for

their kingdom is not of this world, it is yet to come. In all this Cyrus was a type of Christ, who was made victorious over principalities and powers, and entrusted with unsearchable riches, for the use and benefit of God's servants, his elect. *When he ascended on high he led captivity captive*, took those captives that had taken others captives, and opened the prison to those that were bound.

5 *I am the LORD*, and *there is none else*, *there is no God beside me*: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: 6 That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that *there is none beside me*. *I am the LORD*, and *there is none else*. 7 I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things. 8 Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the LORD have created it. 9 Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! *Let the potsherd strive with the potsherd* of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands? 10 Woe unto him that saith unto *his* father, What begettest thou? or to the woman, What hast thou brought forth?

God here asserts his sole and sovereign dominion, as that which he designed to prove and manifest to the world in all the great things he did for Cyrus and by him. Observe,

I. How this doctrine is here laid down concerning the sovereignty of the great Jehovah, in two things:—1. That he is God alone, and there is no God besides him. This is here inculcated as a fundamental truth, which, if it were firmly believed, would abolish idolatry out of the world. With what an awful, commanding, air of majesty and authority, bidding defiance, as it were, to all pretenders, does the great God here proclaim it to the world: *I am the Lord, I the Lord, Jehovah*, and *there is none else*, *there is no God besides me*, no other self-existent, self-sufficient, being, none infinite and eternal. And again (v. 6), *There is none besides me*; all that are set up in competition with me are counterfeits; they are all vanity and a lie, for *I am the Lord*, and *there is none else*. This is here said to Cyrus, not only to cure him of the sin of

his ancestors, which was the worshipping of idols, but to prevent his falling into the sin of some of his predecessors in victory and universal monarchy, which was the setting up of themselves for gods and being idolized, to which some attribute much of the origin of idolatry. Let Cyrus, when he becomes thus rich and great, remember that still he is but a man, and there is no God but one. 2. That he is Lord of all, and there is nothing done without him (v. 7): *I form the light*, which is grateful and pleasing, and *I create darkness*, which is grievous and unpleasing. *I make peace* (put here for all good) and *I create evil*, not the evil of sin (God is not the author of that), but the evil of punishment. *I the Lord order*, and direct, and *do all these things*. Observe, (1.) The very different events that befall the children of men. Light and darkness are opposite to each other, and yet, in the course of providence, they are sometimes intermixed, like the morning and evening twilights, *neither day nor night*, Zech. xiv. 6. There is a mixture of joys and sorrows in the same cup, allays to each other. Sometimes they are counterchanged, as noonday light and midnight darkness. In the revolution of every day each takes its turn, and there are short transitions from the one to the other, witness Job's case. (2.) The self-same cause of both, and that is he that is the first Cause of all: *I the Lord*, the fountain of all being, am the fountain of all power. He who formed the natural light (Gen. i. 3) still forms the providential light. He who at first made peace among the jarring seeds and principles of nature makes peace in the affairs of men. He who allowed the natural darkness, which was a mere privation, creates the providential darkness; for concerning troubles and afflictions he gives positive orders. Note, The wise God has the ordering and disposing of all our comforts, and all our crosses, in this world.

II. How this doctrine is here proved and published. 1. It is proved by that which God did for Cyrus: "*There is no God besides me*, for (v. 5) *I girded thee, though thou hast not known me*. It was not thy own idol, which thou didst know and worship, that girded thee for this expedition, that gave thee authority and ability for it. No, it was I that girded thee, I whom thou didst not know, nor seek to." By this it appears that the God of Israel is the only true God, that he manages and makes what use he pleases even of those that are strangers to him and pay their homage to other gods. 2. It is published to all the world by the word of God, by his providence, and by the testimony of the suffering Jews in Babylon, that all may know from the east and from the west, sunrise and sun-set, that the Lord is God and there is none else. The wonderful deliver-

ance of the Israel of God proclaimed to all the world that *there is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, that rides on the heavens for their help*.

III. How this doctrine is here improved and applied.

1. For the comfort of those that earnestly longed, and yet quietly waited, for the redemption of Israel (v. 8): *Drop down, you heavens, from above*. Some take this as the saints' prayer for the deliverance. I rather take it as God's precept concerning it; for he is said to *command deliverances*, Ps. xlv. 4. Now the precept is directed to heaven and earth, and all the hosts of both, as royal precepts commonly run—*To all officers, civil and military*. All the creatures shall be made in their places to contribute to the carrying on of this great work, when God will have it done. If men will not be aiding and assisting, God will produce it without them, as he does the dews of heaven and the grass of the earth, which *tarry not for man, nor wait for the sons of men*, Mic. v. 7. Observe, (1.) The method of this great deliverance that is to be wrought for Israel. *Righteousness* must first be wrought in them; they must be brought to repent of their sins, to renounce their idolatries, to return to God, and reform their lives, and then the salvation shall be wrought for them, and not till then. We must not expect salvation without righteousness, for they spring up together and together the Lord hath created them; what he has joined together, let not us therefore put asunder. See Ps. lxxxv. 9—11. Christ died to save us from our sins, not in our sins, and is made redemption to us by being made to us righteousness and sanctification. (2.) The means of this great deliverance. Rather than it shall fail, when the set time for it shall come, *the heavens shall drop down righteousness, and the earth shall open to bring forth salvation*, and both concur to the reformation, and so to the restoration, of God's Israel. It is from heaven, from above the skies, that righteousness drops down, for every grace and good gift is from above; nay, since the more plentiful effusion of the Spirit it is now *poured down*, and, if our hearts be open to receive it, the product will be the fruits of righteousness and the great salvation.

2. For reproof to those of the church's enemies that opposed this salvation, or those of her friends that despaired of it (v. 9): *Woe unto him that strives with his Maker!* God is the Maker of all things, and therefore our Maker, which is a reason why we should always submit to him and never contend with him. (1.) Let not the proud oppressors, in the elevation of their spirits, oppose God's designs concerning the deliverance of his people, nor think to detain them any longer when the time shall come for their release. Woe to the insulting Baby-



Ionians that set God at defiance, as Pharaoh did, and will not let his people go! (2.) Let not the poor oppressed, in the dejection of their spirits, murmur and quarrel with God for the prolonging of their captivity, as if he dealt unjustly or unkindly with them, or think to force their way out before God's time shall come. Note, Those will find themselves in a woeful condition that strive with their Maker; for none ever hardened his heart against God and prospered. Sinful man is indeed a quarrelsome creature; but *let the potsherds strive with the potsherds of the earth.* Men are but earthen pots, nay, they are broken potsherds, and are made so very much by their mutual contentions. They are dashed in pieces one against another; and, if they are disposed to strive, let them strive with one another, let them meddle with their match; but let them not dare to contend with him that is infinitely above them, which is as senseless and absurd as, [1.] For the clay to find fault with the potter: *Shall the clay say to him that forms it, "What makest thou? Why dost thou make me of this shape and not that?"* Nay, it is as if the clay should be in such a heat and passion with the potter as to tell him that *he has no hands*, or that he works as awkwardly as if he had none. "Shall the clay pretend to be wiser than the potter and therefore to advise him, or mightier than the potter and therefore to control him?" He that gave us being, that gave us this being, may design concerning us, and dispose of us, as he pleases; and it is impudent presumption for us to prescribe to him. Shall we impeach God's wisdom, or question his power, who are ourselves so curiously, so wonderfully, made? Shall we say, *He has no hands*, whose hands made us and in whose hands we are? The doctrine of God's sovereignty has enough in it to silence all our discontents and objections against the methods of his providence and grace, Rom. ix. 20, 21. [2.] It is as unnatural as for the child to find fault with the parents, to say to the father, *What begettest thou?* or to the mother, *"What hast thou brought forth?"* Why was I not begotten and born an angel, exempt from the infirmities of human nature and the calamities of human life? Must not those who are children of men expect to share in the common lot and to fare as others fare? If God is our Father, where is the honour we owe to him by submitting to his will?

11 Thus saith the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me. 12 I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, *even* my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all

their host have I commanded. 13 I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the LORD of hosts. 14 Thus saith the LORD, The labour of Egypt, and merchandise of Ethiopia and of the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over unto thee, and they shall be thine: they shall come after thee; in chains they shall come over, and they shall fall down unto thee, they shall make supplication unto thee, *saying*, Surely God is in thee; and *there is* none else, *there is* no god. 15 Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour. 16 They shall be ashamed, and also confounded, all of them: they shall go to confusion together *that are* makers of idols. 17 *But* Israel shall be saved in the LORD with an everlasting salvation: ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end. 18 For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: *I am* the LORD; and *there is* none else. 19 I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain: I the LORD speak righteousness, I declare things that are right.

The people of God in captivity, who reconciled themselves to the will of God in their affliction and were content to wait his time for their deliverance, are here assured that they should not wait in vain.

I. They are invited to enquire concerning the issue of their troubles, v. 11. *The Holy One of Israel, and his Maker*, though he does not allow them to strive with him, yet encourages them, 1. To consult his word: "*Ask of me things to come*; have recourse to the prophets and their prophecies, and see what they say concerning these things. Ask the watchmen, What of the night? Ask them, How long?" Things to come, as far as they are revealed, belong to us and to our children, and we must not be strangers to them. 2. To seek unto him by prayer: "*Concerning my sons and concerning the work of my hands*, which as becomes them submit to the will of their Father, the will of their potter, com-

*mand you me*, not by way of prescription, but by way of petition. Be earnest in your requests, and confident in your expectations, as far as both are guided by and grounded upon the promise." We may not strive with our Maker by passionate complaints, but we may wrestle with him by faithful and fervent prayer. *My sons, and the work of my hands, commend to me* (so some read it), bring them to me and leave them with me. See the power of prayer, and its prevalence with God: *Thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am; what would you that I should do unto you?* Some read it with an interrogation, as carrying on the reproof (v. 9, 10): *Do you question me concerning things to come?* and am I bound to give you an account? *And concerning my children, even concerning the work of my hands, will you command me, or prescribe to me?* Dare you do so? *Shall any teach God knowledge, or give law to him?* Those that complain of God do in effect assume an authority over him.

II. They are encouraged to depend upon the power of God when they are brought very low and are utterly incapable of helping themselves, v. 12. *Their help stands in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth*, which he mentions here, not only for his own glory, but for their comfort. The heavens and earth shall contribute, if he please, to the deliverance of the church (v. 8); for he created both, and therefore has both at command. 1. *He made the earth, and created man upon it*, for it was intended to be a habitation for man, Ps. cxv. 16. He has therefore not only authority, but wisdom and power sufficient to govern man here on this earth and to make what use he pleases of him. 2. *His hands have stretched out the heavens, and all their hosts he commanded* into being at first, and therefore still governs all their motions and influences. It is good news to God's Israel that their God is the creator and governor of the world.

III. They are particularly told what God would do for them, that they might know what to depend upon; and this shall lead them to expect a more glorious Redeemer and redemption, of whom, and of which, Cyrus and their deliverance by him were types and figures.

1. Liberty shall be proclaimed to them, v. 13. Cyrus is the man that shall proclaim it; and, in order hereunto, God will put power into his hands: *I have raised him up in righteousness*, that is, in pursuance and performance of my promises and to plead my people's just but injured cause. He will give him success in all his enterprises, particularly that against Babylon: *I will direct all his ways*; and then it follows that he will prosper him, for those must needs speed well that are under a divine direction. God will make plain the way of those whom he designs to employ for him. Two things Cyrus must do for God:—(1.) Jerusalem is God's

city, but it is now in ruins, and he must rebuild it, that is, he must give orders for the rebuilding of it, and give wherewithal to do it. (2.) Israel is God's people, but they are now captives, and he must release them freely and generously, not demanding any ransom, nor compounding with them for price or reward. And Christ is anointed to do that for poor captive souls which Cyrus was to do for the captive Jews, to proclaim the *opening of the prison to those that were bound* (ch. lxi. 1), enlargement from a worse bondage than that in Babylon.

2. Provision shall be made for them. They went out poor, and unable to bear the expenses of their return and re-establishment; and therefore it is promised that the labour of Egypt and other nations should *come over to them and be theirs*, v. 14. Cyrus, having conquered those countries, out of their spoils provided for the returning Jews; and he ordered his subjects to furnish them with necessaries (Ezra i. 4), so that they did not go out empty from Babylon any more than from Egypt. Those that are redeemed by Christ shall be not only provided for, but enriched. Those whose spirits God stirs up to go to the heavenly Zion may depend upon him to bear their charges. The world is theirs as far as is good for them.

3. Proselytes shall be brought over to them: *Men of stature shall come after thee in chains; they shall fall down to thee, saying, Surely God is in thee*. This was in part fulfilled when many of the people of the land became Jews (Esther viii. 17), and said, *We will go with you*, humbly begging leave to do so, *for we have heard that God is with you*, Zech. viii. 23. The restoration would be a means of the conviction of many and the conversion of some. Perhaps many of the Chaldeans who were now themselves conquered by Cyrus, when they saw the Jews going back in triumph, came and begged pardon for the affronts and abuses they had given them, owned that God was among them and that he was God alone, and therefore desired to join themselves to them. But this promise was to have its full accomplishment in the gospel church,—when the Gentiles shall become obedient by word and deed to the faith of Christ (Rom. xv. 18), as willing captives to the church (Ps. cx. 3), glad to wear her chains,—when an infidel, beholding the public worship of Christians, shall own himself convinced that *God is with them of a truth* (1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25) and shall assay to join himself to them,—and when those that had been *of the synagogue of Satan shall come and worship before the church's feet*, and be made to know that *God has loved her* (Rev. iii. 9), and the *kings of the earth and the nations shall bring their glory into the gospel Jerusalem*, Rev. xxi. 24. Note, It is good to be with those, though it be in chains, that have God with them.

IV. They are taught to trust God further



than they can see him. The prophet puts this word into their mouths, and goes before them in saying it (v. 15): *Verily, thou art a God that hidest thyself.* 1. God hid himself when he brought them into the trouble, *hid himself and was wroth*, ch. lvii. 17. Note, Though God be his people's God and Saviour, yet sometimes, when they provoke him, he hides himself from them in displeasure, suspends his favours, and lays them under his frowns: but let them wait upon the Lord that hides his face, ch. viii. 17. 2. He hid himself when he was bringing them out of the trouble. Note, When God is acting as Israel's God and Saviour commonly *his way is in the sea*, Ps. lxxvii. 19. The salvation of the church is carried on in a mysterious way, by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts working on men's spirits (Zech. iv. 6), by weak and unlikely instruments, small and accidental occurrences, and not wrought till the last extremity; but this is our comfort, though God hide himself, we are sure he is the God of Israel, the Saviour. See Job xxxv. 14.

V. They are instructed to triumph over idolaters and all the worshippers of other gods (v. 16): *Those who are makers of idols*, not only who frame them, but who make gods of them by praying to them, *shall be ashamed and confounded*, when they shall be convinced of their mistakes and shall be forced to acknowledge that the God of Israel is the only true God, and when they shall be disappointed in their expectations from their idols, under whose protection they had put themselves. They shall go to confusion when they shall find that they can neither excuse the sin nor escape the punishment of it, Ps. xcvi. 7. It is not here and there one more timorous than the rest that shall thus shrink, and give up the cause, but *all of them*; nay, though they appear in a body, though hand join in hand, and they do all they can to keep one another in countenance, yet *they shall go to confusion together*. Bind them in bundles, to burn them.

VI. They are assured that those who trust in God shall never be made ashamed of their confidence in him, v. 17. Now that God was about to deliver them out of Babylon he directed them by his prophet, 1. To look up to him as the author of their salvation: *Israel shall be saved in the Lord*. Not only their salvation shall be wrought out by his power, but it shall be treasured up for them in his grace and promise, and so secured to them. They shall be saved in him; for his name shall be their strong tower, into which they shall run, and in which they shall be safe. 2. To look beyond this temporal deliverance to that which is spiritual and has reference to another world, to think of that salvation by the Messiah which is an everlasting salvation, the salvation of the soul, a rescue from everlasting misery and a restoration to everlasting bliss. "Give diligence

to make that sure, for it may be made sure, so sure that *you shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end*. You shall not only be delivered from the *everlasting shame and contempt* which will be the portion of idolaters (Dan. xii. 2), but you shall have everlasting honour and glory." [1.] There is a world without end; and it will be well or ill with us according as it will be with us in that world. [2.] Those who are saved with the everlasting salvation shall never be ashamed of what they did or suffered in the hopes of it; for it will so far outdo their expectations as to be a more abundant reimbursement. The returning captives owned that to them did *belong confusion of face* (Dan. ix. 7, 8); yet God tells them that they shall not be confounded, but shall have assurance for ever. Those who are confounded as penitents for their own sin shall not be confounded as believers in God's promise and power.

VII. They are engaged for ever to cleave to God, and never to desert him, never to distrust him. What had been often inculcated before is here again repeated, for the encouragement of his people to continue faithful to him, and to hope that he would be so to them: *I am the Lord, and there is none else*. That the Lord we serve and trust in is God alone appears by the two great lights, that of nature and that of revelation.

1. It appears by the light of nature; for he made the world, and therefore may justly demand its homage (v. 18): "*Thus saith the Lord, that created the heavens and formed the earth, I am the Lord, the sovereign Lord of all, and there is none else.*" The gods of the heathen did not do this, nay, they did not pretend to do it. He here mentions the creation of the heavens, but enlarges more upon that of the earth, because that is the part of the creation which we have the nearest view of and are most conversant with. It is here observed, (1.) That he formed it. It is not a rude and indigested chaos, but cast into the most proper shape and size by Infinite Wisdom. (2.) That he fixed it. When he had made it he established it, *founded it on the seas* (Ps. xxiv. 2), *hung it on nothing* (Job xxvi. 7) as at first he made it of nothing, and yet made it substantial and hung it fast, *ponderibus librata suis—poised by its own weight*. (3.) That he fitted it for use, and for the service of man, to whom he designed to give it. *He created it not in vain*, merely to be a proof of his power; but *he formed it to be inhabited* by the children of men, and for that end he drew the waters off from it, with which it was at first covered, and made the *dry land appear*, Ps. civ. 6, 7. Be it observed here, to the honour of God's wisdom, that he made nothing in vain, but intended every thing for some end and fitted it to answer the intention. If any man prove to have been made in vain, it is his own fault. It should also be observed, to the

honour of God's goodness and his favour to man, that he reckoned that not made in vain which serves for his use and benefit, to be a habitation and maintenance for him.

2. It appears by the light of revelation. As the works of God abundantly prove that he is God alone, so does his word, and the discovery he has made of himself and of his mind and will by it. His oracles far exceed those of the Pagan deities, as well as his operations, v. 19. The preference is here placed in three things:—All that God has said is plain, satisfactory, and just. (1.) In the manner of the delivery of it it is plain and open: *I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth.* The Pagan deities delivered their oracles out of dens and caverns, with a low and hollow voice, and in ambiguous expressions; those that had familiar spirits whispered and muttered (*ch. viii. 19*); but God delivered his law from the top of Mount Sinai before all the thousands of Israel, in distinct, audible, and intelligible sounds. Wisdom *cries in the chief places of concourse*, Prov. i. 20, 21; viii. 1—3. The vision is written, and made plain, so that he who runs may read it; if it be obscure to any, they may thank themselves. Christ pleaded in his own defence what God says here, *In secret have I said nothing*, John xviii. 20. (2.) In the use and benefit of it it was highly satisfactory: *I said not unto the seed of Jacob*, who consulted these oracles and governed themselves by them, *Seek you me in vain*, as the false gods did to their worshippers, who sought *for the living to the dead*, *ch. viii. 19*. This includes all the gracious answers that God gave both to those who consulted him (his word is to them a faithful guide) and to those that prayed to him. The seed of Jacob are a praying people; it is the *generation of those that seek him*, Ps. xxiv. 6. And, as he has in his word invited them to seek him, so he never denied their believing prayers nor disappointed their believing expectations. He said not to them, to any of them, *Seek you me in vain*; for, if he did not think fit to give them the particular thing they prayed for, yet he gave them such a sufficiency of grace and such comfort and satisfaction of soul as were equivalent. What we say of winter is true of prayer, It never rots in the skies. God not only gives a gracious answer to those that diligently seek him, but will be their bountiful rewarder. (3.) In the matter of it it was incontestably just, and there was no iniquity in it: *I the Lord speak righteousness, I declare things that are right*, and consonant to the eternal rules and reasons of good and evil. The heathen deities dictated those things to their worshippers which were the reproach of human nature and tended to the extirpation of virtue; but God speaks righteousness, dictates that which is right in itself and tends to make men righteous; and therefore he is God, and there is none else.

20 Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, ye *that are* escaped of the nations: they have no knowledge that set up the wood of their graven image, and pray unto a god *that* cannot save. 21 Tell ye, and bring *them* near; yea, let them take counsel together: Who hath declared this from ancient time? *Who* hath told it from that time? *Have* not I the LORD? And *there* is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; *there* is none beside me. 22 Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I *am* God, and *there* is none else. 23 I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth *in* righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. 24 Surely, shall *one* say, In the LORD have I righteousness and strength: *even* to him shall *men* come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed. 25 In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.

What is here said is intended, as before,

I. For the conviction of idolaters, to show them their folly in worshipping gods that cannot help them, and neglecting a God that can. Let all *that have escaped of the nations*, not only the people of the Jews, but those of other nations that were by Cyrus released out of captivity in Babylon, let them come, and hear what is to be said against the worshipping of idols, that they may be cured of it as well as the Jews, that Babylon, which had of old been the womb of idolatry, might now become the grave of it. Let the refugees assemble themselves and come together; God has something to say to them for their own good, and it is this, that idolatry is a foolish sottish thing, upon two accounts:—

1. It is setting up a refuge of lies for themselves: *They set up the wood of their graven image*; for that is the *substratum*. Though they overlay it with gold, deck it with ornaments, and make a god of it, yet still it is but wood. They *pray to a god that cannot save*; for he cannot hear, he cannot help, he can do nothing. How do those disparage themselves who give honour to that as a god which cannot, as a god, give good to them! How do those deceive themselves who pray for relief to that which is in no capacity at all to relieve them! Certainly those have no knowledge, or are brutish in their knowledge, who take so much pains, and do so much penance, in seeking the favour of a god that has no power



2. It is setting up a rival with God, the only living and true God (v. 21): "Summon them all; tell them that the great cause hall again be tried, though once adjudged, between God and Baal. *Bring them near, and let them take counsel together* what to say in defence of themselves and their idols. It shall, as before, be put upon this issue: let them show when any of their gods did with any certainty foretell future events, as the God of Israel has done, and it shall be acknowledged that they have some colour for their pretensions. But none of them ever did; their prophets were lying prophets; but *I the Lord have told it from that time, long before it came to pass; therefore you must own there is no other God besides me.*"

(1.) None besides is fit to rule. He is a just God, and rules in justice, and will execute justice for those that are oppressed. (2.) None besides is able to help. As he is a just God, so he is *the Saviour*, who can save without the assistance of any, but without whom none can save. Those therefore have no sense of truth and falsehood, good and evil, no, nor of their own interest, that set up any in competition with him.

II. For the comfort and encouragement of all God's faithful worshippers, whoever they are, v. 22. Those that worship idols pray to gods that cannot save; but the God of Israel says it to all the ends of the earth, to his people, though they are scattered into the utmost corners of the world and seem to be lost and forgotten in their dispersion, "Let them but *look to me* by faith and prayer, look above instruments and second causes, look off from all pretenders, and look up to me, and they shall be saved." It seems to refer further to the conversion of the Gentiles that live in the ends of the earth, the most distant nations, when the standard of the gospel is set up. *To it shall the Gentiles seek.* When Christ is lifted up from the earth, as the brazen serpent upon the pole, he shall draw the eyes of all men to him. They shall all be invited to look unto him, as the stung Israelites did to the brazen serpent; and so strong is the eye of faith that by divine grace it will reach the Saviour and fetch in salvation by him even from the ends of the earth; for *he is God, and there is none else.* Two things are here promised, for the abundant satisfaction of all that by faith look to the Saviour:—

1. That the glory of the God they serve shall be greatly advanced; and this will be good news to all the Lord's people, that, how much soever they and their names are depressed, God will be exalted, v. 23. This is confirmed by an oath, that we might have strong consolation: *I have sworn by myself* (and God can swear by no greater, Heb. vi. 13); *the word has gone out of my mouth*, and shall neither be recalled nor return empty; it has gone forth in righteousness, for it is the most reasonable equitable thing

in the world that he who made all should be Lord of all, that, since all beings are derived from him, they should all be devoted to him. He has said it, and it shall be made good, *I will be exalted*, Ps. xlii. 10. He has assured us, (1.) That he will be universally submitted to, that the kingdoms of the world shall become his kingdom. They shall do him homage—*Unto me every knee shall bow*; and they shall bind themselves by an oath of allegiance to him—*Unto me every tongue shall swear.* This is applied to the dominion of our Lord Jesus, Rom. xiv. 10, 11. *We shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ* and give account to him, for it is written, *As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me and every tongue shall confess to God*; and it seems to be referred to, Ps. ii. 9, 10. If the heart be brought into obedience to Christ, and made willing in the day of his power, the knee will bow to him in humble adorations and addresses, and in cheerful obedience to his commands, submission to his disposals, and compliance with his will in both; and the tongue will swear to him, will lay a bond upon the soul to engage it for ever to him; for he that bears an honest mind never startles at assurances. (2) That he will be universally sought unto, and application shall be made to him from all parts of the world: *Unto him shall men of distant countries come*, to implore his favour. *Unto thee shall all flesh come* with their request, Ps. lxxv. 2. And, when Christ was lifted up from the earth, he drew all men to him. (3.) That it will be to no purpose to make opposition to him. *All that are incensed against him*, that rage at his bonds and cords—the nations that are angry because he has taken to himself his great power and has reigned, that have been incensed at the strictness of his laws, the success of his gospel, and the spiritual nature of his kingdom—they shall be ashamed; some shall be brought to a penitential shame for it, others to a remediless ruin. One way or other, sooner or later, all that are uneasy at Christ's government and victories will be made ashamed of their folly and obstinacy. Blessed be God for the assurance here given us that, whatever becomes of us and our interests, *the Lord will reign for ever!*

2. That the welfare of the souls they are concerned for shall be effectually secured: *Surely shall one say*, and another shall learn by his example to say the same, so that all the seed of Israel, according to the Spirit, shall say, and stand to it, (1.) That God has a sufficiency for them and that in Christ there is enough to supply all their needs. *In the Lord is all righteousness and strength* (so the margin reads it); he is himself righteous and strong. He can do every thing, and yet will do nothing but what is unquestionably just and equitable. He has also wherewithal to supply the needs of those that seek to him and depend upon him, upon

the equity of his providence and the treasures of his grace; nay, we may say, not only "He has it," but, "In him we have it," because he has said that he will be to us a God. In the Lord the captive Jews had righteousness (that is, grace both to sanctify their afflictions to them and to qualify them for deliverance) and strength for their support and escape. In the Lord Jesus we have righteousness to recommend us to the good-will of God towards us, and strength to begin and carry on the good work of God in us. He is the fountain of both, and on him we must depend for both, must go forth in his strength, and make mention of his righteousness, Ps. lxxi. 16. (2.) That they shall have an abundant bliss and satisfaction in this. [1.] The people of the Jews shall in the Lord be justified before men and openly glory in their God. The oppressors reproached them, loaded them with calumny, and boasted even of a right to oppress them, as abandoned by their God; but, when God shall work out their deliverance, that shall be their justification from these hard censures, and therefore they shall glory in it. [2.] All true Christians, that depend upon Christ for strength and righteousness, in him shall be justified and shall glory in that. Observe, *First*, All believers are the seed of Israel, an upright praying seed. *Secondly*, The great privilege they enjoy by Jesus Christ is that in him, and for his sake, they are justified before God, Christ being made of God to them righteousness. All that are justified will own it is in Christ that they are justified, nor could they be justified by any other; and those who are justified shall be glorified. And therefore, *Thirdly*, The great duty believers owe to Christ is to glory in him, and to make their boast of him. *Therefore* he is made all in all to us, that *whoso glories may glory in the Lord*; and let us comply with this intention.

## CHAP. XLVI.

God, by the prophet here, designing shortly to deliver them out of their captivity, prepares them for that deliverance by possessing them with a detestation of idols and with a believing confidence in God, even their own God. I. Let them not be afraid of the idols of Babylon, as if they could in any way obstruct their deliverance, for they should be defaced (ver. 1, 2); but let them trust in that God who had often delivered them to do it still, to do it now, ver. 3, 4. II. Let them not think to make idols of their own, images of the God of Israel, by them to worship him, as the Babylonians worship their gods, ver. 5-7. Let them not be so sottish (ver. 5), but have an eye to God in his word, not in an image; let them depend upon that, and upon the promises and predictions of it, and God's power to accomplish them all, ver. 9-11. And let them know that the unbelief of man shall not make the word of God of no effect, ver. 12, 13.

**B**EL boweth down, Nebo stoopeth, their idols were upon the beasts, and upon the cattle: your carriages were heavy loaden; they are a burden to the weary beast. 2 They stoop, they bow down together; they could not deliver the burden, but themselves are gone into captivity. 3 Harken unto me, O house of Ja-

cob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which are borne *by me* from the belly, which are carried from the womb: 4 And *even to your old age I am* he; and *even to hoar hairs will I carry you*: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver *you*.

We are here told,

I. That the false gods will certainly fail their worshippers when they have most need of them, v. 1, 2. Bel and Nebo were two celebrated idols of Babylon. Some make Bel to be a contraction of Baal; others rather think not, but that it was Belus, one of their first kings, who after his death was deified. As Bel was a deified prince, so (some think) Nebo was a deified prophet, for so Nebo signifies; so that Bel and Nebo were their Jupiter and their Mercury or Apollo. Barnabas and Paul passed at Lystra for Jupiter and Mercury. The names of these idols were taken into the names of their princes, Bel into Belshazzar's, Nebo into Nebuchadnezzar's and Nebuzaradan's, &c. These gods they had long worshipped, and in their revels praised them for their successes (as appears, Dan. v. 4); and they insulted over Israel as if Bel and Nebo were too hard for Jehovah and could detain them in captivity in defiance of their God. Now, that this might be no discouragement to the poor captives, God here tells them what shall become of these idols, which they threaten them with. When Cyrus takes Babylon, down go the idols. It was usual then with conquerors to destroy the gods of the places and people they conquered, and to put the gods of their own nation in the room of them, ch. xxxvii. 19. Cyrus will do so; and then Bel and Nebo, that were set up on high, and looked great, bold, and erect, shall stoop and bow down at the feet of the soldiers that plunder their temples. And because there is a great deal of gold and silver upon them, which was intended to adorn them, but serves to expose them, they carry them away with the rest of the spoil. The carriers' horses, or mules, are laden with them and their other idols, to be sent among other lumber (for so it seems they accounted them rather than treasure) into Persia. So far are they from being able to support their worshippers that they are themselves a heavy load in the waggons, and a burden to the weary beast. The idols cannot help one another (v. 2): *They stoop, they bow down together*. They are all alike, tottering things, and their day has come to fall. Their worshippers cannot help them: *They could not deliver the burden out of the enemy's hand, but themselves* (both the idols and the idolaters) *have gone into captivity*. Let not therefore God's people be afraid of either. When God's ark was taken prisoner by the



Philistines it proved a burden, not to the beasts, but to the conquerors, who were forced to return it; but, when Bel and Nebo have gone into captivity, their worshippers may even give their good word with them: they will never recover themselves.

II. That the true God will never fail his worshippers: "You hear what has become of Bel and Nebo, now *hearken to me, O house of Jacob!* v. 3, 4. Am I such a god as these? No; though you are brought low, and the house of Israel is but a remnant, your God has been, is, and ever will be, your powerful and faithful protector."

1. Let God's Israel do him the justice to own that he has hitherto been kind to them, careful of them, tender over them, and has all along done well for them. Let them own, (1.) That he bore them at first: *I have made.* Out of what womb came they, but that of his mercy, and grace, and promise? He formed them into a people and gave them their constitution. Every good man is what God makes him. (2.) That he bore them up all along: You have been *borne by me from the belly, and carried from the womb.* God began betimes to do them good, as soon as ever they were formed into a nation, nay, when as yet they were very few, and strangers. God took them under a special protection, and *suffered no man to do them wrong,* Ps. cv. 12—14. In the infancy of their state, when they were not only foolish and helpless, as children, but froward and peevish, God carried them in the arms of his power and love, bore them *as upon eagles' wings,* Exod. xix. 4; Deut. xxxii. 11. Moses had not patience to *carry them as the nursing father does the sucking child* (Num. xi. 12), but God bore them, and *bore their manners,* Acts xiii. 18. And as God began early to do them good (when *Israel was a child, then I loved him*), so he had constantly continued to do them good: he had carried them from the womb to this day. And we may all witness for God that he has been thus gracious to us. We have been borne by him from the belly, from the womb, else we should have died from the womb and given up the ghost when we came out of the belly. We have been the constant care of his kind providence, carried in the arms of his power and in the bosom of his love and pity. The new man is so; all that in us which is born of God is borne up by him, else it would soon fail. Our spiritual life is sustained by his grace as necessarily and constantly as our natural life by his providence. The saints have acknowledged that God has carried them from the womb, and have encouraged themselves with the consideration of it in their greatest straits, Ps. xxii. 9, 10; lxxi. 5, 6, 17.

2. He will then do them the kindness to promise that he will never leave them. He *that was their first will be their last*; he that was the author will be the finisher of

their well-being (v. 4): "You have been *borne by me from the belly, nursed* when you were children; and *even to your old age I am he,* when, by reason of your decays and infirmities, you will need help as much as in your infancy." Israel were now growing old, so was their covenant by which they were incorporated, Heb. viii. 13. *Gray hairs were here and there upon them,* Hos. vii. 9. And they had hastened their old age, and the calamities of it, by their irregularities. But God will not cast them off now, will not fail them when their strength fails; he is still their God, will still carry them in the same everlasting arms that were laid under them in Moses's time, Deut. xxxiii. 27. He has made them and owns his interest in them, and therefore he will bear them, will bear with their infirmities, and bear them up under their afflictions: "Even *I will carry and will deliver them*; I will now bear them upon eagles' wings out of Babylon, as in their infancy I bore them out of Egypt." This promise to aged Israel is applicable to every aged Israelite. God has graciously engaged to support and comfort his faithful servants, even in their old age: "Even *to your old age,* when you grow unfit for business, when you are compassed with infirmities, and perhaps your relations begin to grow weary of you, yet *I am he*—he that I am, he that I have been—the very same by whom you have been borne from the belly and carried from the womb. You change, but I am the same. I am he that I have promised to be, he that you have found me, and he that you would have me to be. *I will carry you, I will bear,* will bear you up and bear you out, and will carry you on in your way and carry you home at last."

5 To whom will ye liken me, and make *me* equal, and compare me, that we may be like? 6 They lavish gold out of the bag, and weigh silver in the balance, and hire a goldsmith; and he maketh it a god: they fall down, yea, they worship. 7 They bear him upon the shoulder, they carry him, and set him in his place, and he standeth; from his place shall he not remove: yea, *one* shall cry unto him, yet can he not answer, nor save him out of his trouble. 8 Remember this, and show yourselves men: bring *it* again to mind, O ye transgressors. 9 Remember the former things of old: for *I am* God, and *there is* none else; *I am* God, and *there is* none like me, 10 Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times *the things* that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall

stand, and I will do all my pleasure :  
 11 Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country : yea, I have spoken *it*, I will also bring it to pass ; I have purposed *it*, I will also do it.  
 12 Harken unto me, ye stout-hearted, that *are* far from righteousness : 13 I bring near my righteousness ; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry : and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory.

The deliverance of Israel by the destruction of Babylon (the general subject of all these chapters) is here insisted upon, and again promised, for the conviction both of idolaters who set up as rivals with God, and of oppressors who were enemies to the people of God.

I. For the conviction of those who made and worshipped idols, especially those of Israel who did so, who would have images of their God, as the Babylonians had of theirs,

1. He challenges them either to frame an image that should be thought a resemblance of him or to set up any being that should stand in competition with him (v. 5) : *To whom will you liken me?* It is absurd to think of representing an infinite and eternal Spirit by the figure of any creature whatsoever. It is to change his truth into a lie and to turn his glory into shame. None ever saw any similitude of him, nor can see his face and live. *To whom then can we liken God?* ch. xl. 18, 25. It is likewise absurd to think of making any creature equal with the Creator, who is infinitely above the noblest creatures, yea, or to make any comparison between the creature and the Creator, since between infinite and finite there is no proportion.

2. He exposes the folly of those who made idols and then prayed to them, v. 6, 7. (1.) They were at great charge upon their idols and spared no cost to fit them for their purpose : *They lavish gold out of the bag ;* no little will serve, and they do not care how much goes, though they pinch their families and weaken their estates by it. How does the profuseness of idolaters shame the niggardliness of many who call themselves God's servants but are for a religion that will cost them nothing ! Some *lavish gold out of the bag* to make an idol of it in the house, while others *hoard up gold in the bag* to make an idol of it in the heart ; for *covetousness is idolatry*, as dangerous, though not as scandalous, as the other. *They weigh silver in the balance*, either to be the matter of their idol (for even those that were most sottish had so much sense as to think that God should be served with the best they had, the best they could possibly afford ; those that represented him by a calf made it

a golden one) or to pay the workmen's wages. The service of sin often proves very expensive. (2.) They were in great care about their idols and took no little pains about them (v. 7) : *They bear him upon their own shoulders*, and do not hire porters to do it ; *they carry him, and set him in his place*, more like a dead corpse than a living God. They set him on a pedestal, *and he stands*. They take a great deal of pains to fasten him, and *from his place he shall not remove*, that they may know where to find him, though at the same time they know he can neither move a hand nor stir a step to do them any kindness. (3.) After all, they paid great respect to their idols, though they were but the works of their own hands and the creatures of their own fancies. When the goldsmith has made it that which they please to call a god *they fall down, yea, they worship it*. If they magnified themselves too much in pretending to make a god, as if they would atone for that, they vilified themselves as much in prostrating themselves to a god that they knew the original of. And, if they were deceived by the custom of their country in making such gods as these, they did no less deceive themselves when they cried unto them, though they knew they could not answer them, could not understand what they said to them, nor so much as reply Yea, or No, much less could they *save them out of their trouble*. Now shall any that have some knowledge of, and interest in, the true and living God, thus make fools of themselves ?

3. He puts it to themselves, and their own reason, let that judge in the case (v. 8) : *"Remember this,* that has been often told you, what senseless helpless things idols are, *and show yourselves men*—men and not brutes, men and not babes. Act with reason ; act with resolution ; act for your own interest. Do a wise thing ; do a brave thing ; and scorn to disparage your own judgment as you do when you worship idols." Note, Sinners would become saints if they would but show themselves men, if they would but support the dignity of their nature and use aright its powers and capacities. "Many things you have been reminded of ; *bring them again to mind*, recal them into your memories, and revolve them there. *O ! you transgressors, consider your ways ; remember whence you have fallen, and repent,* and so recover yourselves."

4. He again produces incontestable proofs that he is God, that he and none besides is so (v. 9) : *I am God, and there is none else*, none besides me ; *I am God, and there is none like me*. This is that which we have need to be reminded of again and again ; for proof of it he refers, (1.) To the sacred history : *"Remember the former things of old,* what the God of Israel did for his people in their beginnings, whether he did not that for them which no one else could, and which the false gods did not, nor could do, for



their worshippers. Remember those things, and you will own that *I am God and there is none else.*" This is a good reason why we should give glory to him as a nonsuch, and why we should not give that glory to any other which is due to him alone, Exod. xv. 11. (2.) To the sacred prophecy. He is God alone, for it is he only that *declares the end from the beginning*, v. 10. From the beginning of time he declared the end of time, the end of all things. Enoch prophesied, *Behold, the Lord comes.* From the beginning of a nation he declares what the end of it will be. He told Israel what should befall them in the latter days, what their end should be, and wished they were so wise as to consider it, Deut. xxxii. 20, 29. From the beginning of an event he declares what the end of it will be. *Known unto God are all his works*, and, when he pleases, he makes them known. Further than prophecy guides us it is impossible for us to find out the work that God makes from the beginning to the end, Eccl. iii. 11. He declares from ancient times the things that are not yet done. Many scripture prophecies which were delivered long ago are not yet accomplished; but the accomplishment of some in the mean time is an earnest of the accomplishment of the rest in due time. By this it appears that he is God, and none else; it is he, and none besides, that can say, and make his words good, "*My counsel shall stand*, and all the powers of hell and earth cannot control or disannul it nor all their policies correct or countermines it." As God's operations are all according to his counsels, so his counsels shall all be fulfilled in his operations, and none of his measures shall be broken, none of his designs shall miscarry. This yields abundant satisfaction to those who have bound up all their comforts in God's counsels, that his counsel shall undoubtedly stand; and, if we are brought to this, that whatever pleases God pleases us, nothing can contribute more to make us easy than to be assured of this, that *God will do all his pleasure*, Ps. cxxxv. 6. The accomplishment of this particular prophecy, which relates to the elevation of Cyrus and his agency in the deliverance of God's people out of their captivity, is mentioned for the confirmation of this truth, that the Lord is God and there is none else; and this is a thing which shall shortly come to pass, v. 11. God by his counsel calls a ravenous bird from the east, a bird of prey, Cyrus, who (they say) had a nose like the beak of a hawk or eagle, to which some think this alludes, or (as others say) to the eagle which was his standard, as it was afterwards that of the Romans, to which there is supposed to be a reference, Matt. xxiv. 28. Cyrus came from the east at God's call: for God is Lord of hosts and of those that have hosts at command. And, if God give him a call, he will give him success. He is the man that shall *execute God's*

counsel, though he comes from a far country and knows nothing of the matter. Note, Even those that know not, and mind not, God's revealed will, are made use of to fulfil the counsels of his secret will, which shall all be punctually accomplished in their season by what hand he pleases. That which is here added, to ratify this particular prediction, may abundantly show to the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel: "*I have spoken it* by my servants the prophets, and what I have spoken is just the same with what *I have purposed.*" For, though God has many things in his purposes which are not in his prophecies, he has nothing in his prophecies but what are in his purposes. And he *will do it*, for he will never change his mind; he *will bring it to pass*, for it is not in the power of any creature to control him. Observe with what majesty he says it, as one having authority: *I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass. Dictum, factum*—no sooner said than done. *I have purposed it*, and he does not say, "*I will take care it shall be done,*" but, "*I will do it.*" Heaven and earth shall pass away sooner than one tittle of the word of God.

II. For the conviction of those that daringly opposed the counsels of God assurance is here given not only that they shall be accomplished, but that they shall be accomplished very shortly, v. 12, 13.

1. This is addressed to the *stout-hearted*, that is, either, (1.) The proud and obstinate Babylonians, that are far from righteousness, far from doing justice or showing mercy to those they have power over, that say they will never let the oppressed go free, but will still detain them in spite of their petitions or God's predictions, that are far from any thing of clemency or compassion to the miserable. Or, (2.) The unhumiliated Jews, that have been long under the hammer, long in the furnace, but are not broken, are not melted, that, like the unbelieving murmuring Israelites in the wilderness, think themselves far from God's righteousness (that is, from the performance of his promise, and his appearing to judge for them), and by their distrusts set themselves at a yet further distance from it, and keep good things from themselves, as their fathers, who could not enter into the land of promise because of unbelief. This is applicable to the Jewish nation when they rejected the gospel of Christ; though they followed after the law of righteousness, they attained not to righteousness, because they sought it not by faith, Rom. ix. 31, 32. They perished far from righteousness; and it was because they were *stout-hearted*, Rom. x. 3.

2. Now to them God says that, whatever they think, the one in presumption, the other in despair, (1.) Salvation shall be certainly wrought for God's people. If men will not do them justice, God will, and his righteousness shall effect that for them which men's



righteousness would not reach to. He will place salvation in Zion, that is, he will make Jerusalem a place of safety and defence to all those who will plant themselves there; thence shall salvation go forth for Israel his glory. God glories in his Israel; and he will be glorified in the salvation he designs to work out for them; it shall redound greatly to his honour. This salvation shall be in Zion; for thence the gospel shall take rise (*ch. ii. 3*), thither the Redeemer comes (*ch. lix. 20, Rom. xi. 26*), and it is Zion's King that has salvation, *Zech. ix. 9.* (2.) It shall be very shortly wrought. This is especially insisted on with those who thought it at a distance: "*I bring near my righteousness, nearer than you think of; perhaps it is nearest of all when your straits are greatest and your enemies most injurious; it shall not be far off when there is occasion for it, Ps. lxxxv. 9. Behold, the Judge stands before the door. My salvation shall not tarry any longer than till it is ripe and you are ready for it; and therefore, though it tarry, wait for it; wait patiently, for he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.*"

## CHAP. XLVII.

Infinite Wisdom could have ordered things so that Israel might have been released and yet Babylon unhurt; but if they will harden their hearts, and will not let the people go, they must thank themselves that their ruin is made to pave the way to Israel's release. That ruin is here, in this chapter, largely foretold, not to gratify a spirit of revenge in the people of God, who had been used barbarously by them, but to encourage their faith and hope concerning their own deliverance, and to be a type of the downfall of that great enemy of the New-Testament church which, in the Revelation, goes under the name of "Babylon." In this chapter we have, I. The greatness of the ruin threatened, that Babylon should be brought down to the dust, and made completely miserable, should fall from the height of prosperity into the depth of adversity, *ver. 1—5.* II. The sins that provoked God to bring this ruin upon them. 1. Their cruelty to the people of God, *ver. 6.* 2. Their pride and carnal security, *ver. 7—9.* 3. Their confidence in themselves and contempt of God, *ver. 10.* 4. Their use of magic arts and their dependence upon enchantments and sorceries, which should be so far from standing them in any stead that they should but hasten their ruin, *ver. 11—15.*

**C**OME down, and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon, sit on the ground: *there is* no throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans: for thou shalt no more be called tender and delicate. 2 Take the millstones, and grind meal: uncover thy locks, make bare the leg, uncover the thigh, pass over the rivers. 3 Thy nakedness shall be uncovered, yea, thy shame shall be seen: I will take vengeance, and I will not meet *thee as a man.* 4 *As for* our redeemer, the LORD of hosts *is* his name, the Holy One of Israel. 5 Sit thou silent, and get thee into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans: for thou shalt no more be called, The lady of kingdoms. 6 I was wroth with my people, I have polluted mine inheritance, and given them into thine hand: thou

didst show them no mercy; upon the ancient hast thou very heavily laid thy yoke.

In these verses God by the prophet sends a messenger even to Babylon, like that of Jonah to Nineveh: "The time is at hand when Babylon shall be destroyed." Fair warning is thus given her, that she may by repentance prevent the ruin and there may be a lengthening of her tranquillity. We may observe here,

I. God's controversy with Babylon. We will begin with that, for there all the calamity begins; she has made God her enemy, and then who can befriend her: Let her know that the righteous Judge, to whom vengeance belongs, has said (*v. 3*), *I will take vengeance.* She has provoked God, and shall be reckoned with for it when the measure of her iniquities is full. Woe to those on whom God comes to take vengeance; for who knows the power of his anger and what a fearful thing it is to fall into his hands? Were it a man like ourselves who would be revenged on us, we might hope to be a match for him, either to make our escape from him or to make our part good with him. But he says, "*I will not meet thee as a man,* not with the compassions of a man, but I will be to thee as a lion, and a young lion" (*Hos. v. 14*); or, rather, not with the strength of a man, which is easily resisted, but with the power of a God, which cannot be resisted. Not with the justice of a man, which may be bribed, or biassed, or mollified by a foolish pity, but with the justice of a God, which is strict and severe, and can never be evaded. As in pardoning the penitent, so in punishing the impenitent, he is *God and not man*, *Hos. xi. 9.*

II. The particular ground of this controversy. We are sure that there is cause for it, and it is a just cause; it is the *vengeance of his temple* (*Jer. l. 23*); it is for *violence done to Zion*, *Jer. li. 35.* God will plead his people's cause against them. It is acknowledged (*v. 6*) that God had, in wrath, delivered his people into the hands of the Babylonians, had made use of them for the correction of his children, and had by their means *polluted his inheritance*, had left his peculiar people exposed to suffer in common with the rest of the nations, had suffered the heathen, who should have been kept at a distance, to *come into his sanctuary and defile his temple*, *Ps. lxxix. 1.* Herein God was righteous; but the Babylonians carried the matter too far, and, when they had them in their hands (triumphing to see a people that had been so much in reputation for wisdom, holiness, and honour, brought thus low), with a base and servile spirit they trampled upon them, *and showed them no mercy*, no, not the common instances of humanity which the miserable are entitled to purely by their misery. They used them



barbarously, and with an air of contempt, nay, and of complacency in their calamities. They were brought under the yoke; but, as if that were not enough, they *laid the yoke on very heavily*, adding affliction to the afflicted. Nay, they laid it *on the ancient*—the elders in years, who were past their labour, and must sink under a yoke which those in their youthful strength would easily bear—the elders in office, those that had been judges and magistrates, and persons of the first rank. They took a pride in putting these to the meanest hardest drudgery. Jeremiah laments this, that the *faces of elders were not honoured*, Lam. v. 12. Nothing brings a surer or a sorer ruin upon any people than cruelty, especially to God's Israel.

III. The terror of this controversy. She has reason to tremble when she is told who it is that has this quarrel with her (v. 4): "*As for our Redeemer, our Goël, that undertakes to plead our cause as the avenger of our blood, he has two names which speak not only comfort to us, but terror to our adversaries.*" 1. "*He is the Lord of hosts, that has all the creatures at his command, and therefore has all power both in heaven and in earth.*" Woe to those against whom the Lord fights, for the whole creation is at war with them. 2. "*He is the Holy One of Israel, a God in covenant with us, who has his residence among us, and will faithfully perform all the promises he has made to us.*" God's power and holiness are engaged against Babylon and for Zion. This may fitly be applied to Christ, our great Redeemer. He is both Lord of hosts and the Holy One of Israel.

IV. The consequences of it to Babylon. She is called a *virgin*, because so she thought herself, though she was the mother of harlots. She was beautiful as a virgin, and courted by all about her; she had been called *tender and delicate* (v. 1), and the *lady of kingdoms* (v. 5); but now the case is altered. 1. Her honour is gone, and she must bid farewell to all her dignity. She that had sat at the upper end of the world, sat in state and sat at ease, must now *come down and sit in the dust*, as very mean and a deep mourner, must *sit on the ground*, for she shall be so emptied and impoverished that she shall not have a seat left her to sit upon. 2. Her power is gone, and she must bid farewell to all her dominion. She shall rule no more as she has done, nor give law as she has done to her neighbours: *There is no throne, none for thee, O daughter of the Chaldeans!* Note, Those that abuse their honour or power provoke God to deprive them of it, and to make them *come down and sit in the dust*. 3. Her ease and pleasure are gone: "*She shall no more be called tender and delicate* as she has been, for she shall not only be deprived of all those things with which she pampered herself, but shall

be put to hard service and made to feel both want and pain, which will be more than doubly grievous to her who formerly would not venture to set so much as the sole of her foot to the ground for tenderness and for delicacy," Deut. xxviii. 56. It is our wisdom not to use ourselves to be tender and delicate, because we know not how hardly others may use us before we die nor what straits we may be reduced to. 4. Her liberty is gone, and she is brought into a state of servitude and as sore a bondage as she in her prosperity had brought others to. Even the great men of Babylon must now receive the same law from the conquerors that they used to give to the conquered: "*Take the mill-stones and grind meal* (v. 2), set to work, to hard labour" (like beating hemp in Bridewell), "*which will make thee sweat so that thou must throw off all thy head-dresses, and uncover thy locks.*" When they were driven from one place to another, at the capricious humours of their masters, they must be forced to wade up to the middle through the waters, to *make bare the leg and uncover the thigh*, that they might *pass over the rivers*, which would be a great mortification to those that used to ride in state. But let them not complain, for just thus they had formerly used their captives; and *with what measure they then meted it is now measured to them again*. Let those that have power use it with temper and moderation, considering that the spoke which is uppermost will be under. 5. All her glory, and all her glorying, are gone. Instead of glory, she has ignominy (v. 3): *Thy nakedness shall be uncovered and thy shame shall be seen*, according to the base and barbarous usage they commonly gave their captives, to whom, for covetousness of their clothes, they did not leave rags sufficient to cover their nakedness, so void were they of the modesty as well as of the pity due to the human nature. Instead of glorying she *sits silently, and gets into darkness* (v. 5), ashamed to show her face, for she has quite lost her credit and *shall no more be called the lady of kingdoms*. Note, God can make those sit silently that used to make the greatest noise in the world, and send those into darkness that used to make the greatest figure. Let him that glories, therefore, glory in a God that changes not, and not in any worldly wealth, pleasure, or honour, which are subject to change.

7 And thou saidst, I shall be a lady for ever: so that thou didst not lay these things to thy heart, neither didst remember the latter end of it. 8 Therefore hear now this, thou that art given to pleasures, that dwellest carelessly, that sayest in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall

I know the loss of children: 9 But these two *things* shall come to thee in a moment in one day, the loss of children, and widowhood: they shall come upon thee in their perfection for the multitude of thy sorceries, and for the great abundance of thine enchantments. 10 For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness: thou hast said, None seeth me. Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou hast said in thine heart, I *am*, and none else beside me. 11 Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know from whence it riseth: and mischief shall fall upon thee; thou shalt not be able to put it off: and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, *which* thou shalt not know. 12 Stand now with thine enchantments, and with the multitude of thy sorceries, wherein thou hast laboured from thy youth; if so be thou shalt be able to profit, if so be thou mayest prevail. 13 Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from *these things* that shall come upon thee. 14 Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: *there shall not be* a coal to warm at, nor fire to sit before it. 15 Thus shall they be unto thee with whom thou hast laboured, *even* thy merchants, from thy youth: they shall wander every one to his quarter; none shall save thee.

Babylon, now doomed to ruin, is here justly upbraided with her pride, luxury, and security, in the day of her prosperity, and the confidence she had in her own wisdom and forecast, and particularly in the prognostications and counsels of the astrologers. These things are mentioned both to justify God in bringing these judgments upon her and to mortify her, and put her to so much the greater shame, under these judgments; for, when God comes forth to take vengeance, glory belongs to him, but confusion to the sinner.

I. The Babylonians are here upbraided with their pride and haughtiness, and the great conceit they had of themselves, because of their wealth and power, and the

vast extent of their dominion; it was the language both of the government and of the body of the people: *Thou sayest in thy heart* (and God, who searches all hearts, can tell men what they say there, though they never speak it out) *I am, and none else besides me*, v. 8 and 10. The repetition of this part of the charge intimates that they said it often, and that it was very offensive to God. It is the very word that God has often said concerning himself, *I am, and none else besides me*, denoting his self-existence, his infinite and incomparable perfections, and his sole supremacy. All this Babylon pretends to; and no wonder if she that assumed a power to make what gods and goddesses she pleased for the people to worship made herself one among the rest. It is presumption to say of any creature, "It is, and there is not its like, there is none besides it" (for creatures stand very nearly upon a level with one another); but it is insufferable arrogance for any to say so of themselves, and an evidence of their self-ignorance.

II. They are upbraided with their luxury and love of ease (v. 8): "*Thou that art given to pleasures*, art a slave to them, art in them as in thy element, and, that thou mayest enjoy them without disturbance or interruption, *dwellest carelessly* and layest nothing to heart." Great wealth and plenty are great temptations to sensuality, and, where there is fulness of bread, there is commonly abundance of idleness. But if those that are given to pleasures, and dwell carelessly, would but hear this, that *for all these things God will bring them into judgment*, it would be a damp to their mirth, an allay to their pleasure, and would find them something to be in care about.

III. They are upbraided with their carnal security and their vain confidence of the perpetuity of their pomps and pleasures. This is much insisted on here. Observe,

1. The cause of their security. They thought themselves safe and out of danger, not because they were ignorant of the uncertainty of all earthly enjoyments and the inevitable fate that attends states and kingdoms as well as particular persons, but *because they did not lay this to heart*, did not apply it to themselves, nor give it a due consideration. They lulled themselves asleep in ease and pleasure, and dreamt of nothing else but that *to-morrow should be as this day, and much more abundant*. They did not remember the latter end of it—the latter end of their prosperity, that it is a fading flower, and will wither—the latter end of their iniquity, that it will be bitterness, that the day will come when their injustice and oppression must be reckoned for and punished. *She did not remember her latter end* (so some read it); she forgot that her day would come to fall and what would be in the end hereof. It was the ruin of Jerusalem (Lam.



i. 9) that *she remembered not her last end, therefore she came down wonderfully*; and it was Babylon's ruin too. The children of men are easy, and think themselves safe, in their sinful ways, only because they never think of death, and judgment, and their future state.

2. The ground of their security. They trusted in their wickedness and in their wisdom, v. 10. (1.) Their power and wealth, which they had gotten by fraud and oppression, were their confidence: *Thou hast trusted in thy wickedness*, as Doeg, Ps. lii. 7. Many have so debauched their own consciences, and have got to such a pitch of daring wickedness, that they stick at nothing; and this they trust to carry them through those difficulties which embarrass men who make conscience of what they say and do. They doubt not but they shall be too hard for all their enemies, because they dare lie, and kill, and forswear themselves, and do any thing for their interest. Thus they trust in their wickedness to secure them, which is the only thing that will ruin them. (2.) Their policy and craft, which they called their *wisdom*, were their confidence. They thought they could outwit all mankind, and therefore might set all their enemies at defiance. But their *wisdom and knowledge perverted them*, and turned them out of the way, made them forget themselves, and the preparation necessary to be made for hereafter.

3. The expressions of their security. Three things this proud and haughty monarchy said, in her security:—(1.) *"I shall be a lady for ever,"* v. 7. She looked upon the patent of her honour to be not merely during the pleasure of the sovereign Lord, the fountain of honour, or during her own good behaviour, but to be perpetual to the present generation and their heirs and successors for ever. She was not only proud that she was a lady, but confident that she should be a lady for ever. Thus the New-Testament Babylon says, *I sit as a queen, and shall see no sorrow*, Rev. xviii. 7. Those ladies mistake themselves, and consider not their latter end, who think they shall be ladies for ever; for death will shortly lay their honour with them in the dust. Saints will be saints for ever, but lords and ladies will not be so for ever. (2.) *"I shall not sit as a widow*, in solitude and sorrow, shall never lose the power and wealth I am thus wedded to; the monarchy shall never want a monarch to espouse and protect it, and be a husband to the state; *nor shall I know the loss of children,"* v. 8. She was as confident of the continuance of the numbers of her people as of the dignity of her prince, and had no fear of being either deposed or depopulated. Those that are in the height of prosperity are apt to fancy themselves out of the reach of adverse fate. (3.) *"No one sees me when I do amiss, and therefore*

there will be none to call me to an account," v. 10. It is common for sinners to promise themselves impunity, because they promise themselves secrecy, in their wicked ways. They trust to their wicked arts and designs to stand them in stead, because they think they have carried them on so plausibly that none can discern the wickedness and deceit of them.

4. The punishment of their security. It shall be their ruin; and it will be, (1.) A complete ruin, the ruin of all their comforts and confidences: *"These two things shall come upon thee* (the very two things that thou didst set at defiance), *loss of children and widowhood*, v. 9. Both thy princes and thy people shall be cut off, so that thou shalt be no more a government, no more a nation." Note, God often brings upon secure sinners those very mischiefs which they least feared and thought themselves in least danger of. *"They shall come upon thee in their perfection*, with all their aggravating circumstances and without any thing to allay or mitigate them." Afflictions to God's children are not afflictions in perfection. Widowhood is not to them a calamity in perfection, for they have this to comfort themselves with, that their Maker is their husband; loss of children is not, for he is better to them than ten sons. But on his enemies they come in perfection. Widowhood and loss of children are either of them great griefs, but both together great indeed. Naomi thinks she may well be called *Marah* when she is *left both of her sons and of her husband* (Ruth i. 5); and yet on her these evils did not come in perfection, for she had two daughters-in-law left, that were comforts to her. But on Babylon they come in perfection; she has no comfort remaining. (2.) It will be a sudden and surprising ruin. The evil shall come *in one day, nay, in a moment*, which will make it much the more terrible, especially to those that were so very secure. *"Evil shall come upon thee* (v. 11) and thou shalt have neither time nor way to provide against it, or to prepare for it; *for thou shalt not know whence it rises*, and therefore shalt not know where to stand upon thy guard." *Thou shalt not know the morning thereof*; so the Hebrew phrase is. We know just when and where the day will break and the sun rise, but we know not what the day, when it comes, will bring forth, nor when or where trouble will arise; perhaps the storm may come from that point of the compass which we little thought of. Babylon pretended to great wisdom and knowledge (v. 10), but with all her knowledge she cannot foresee, nor with all her wisdom prevent, the ruin threatened: *"Desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, as a thief in the night, which thou shalt not know, that is, which thou little thoughtest of."* Fair warning was indeed given them, by

Isaiah and other prophets of the Lord, of this desolation; but they slighted that notice, and would give no credit to it, and therefore justly is it so ordered that they should have no other notice of it, but that partly through their own security, and partly through the swiftness and subtlety of the enemy, when it came it should be a perfect surprise to them. Those that slight the warnings of the written word, let them not expect any other premonitions. (3.) It will be an irresistible ruin, and such as they will have no fence against: "*Mischief shall come upon thee* so suddenly that thou shalt have no time to turn thee in, so strongly that thou shalt not be able to make head against it and to put it off and save thyself." There is no opposing the judgments of God when they come with commission. Babylon herself, with all her wealth, and power, and multitude, is not able to put off the mischief that comes.

IV. They are upbraided with their divinations, their magical and astrological arts and sciences, which the Chaldeans, above any other nation, were notorious for, and from them other nations borrowed all their learning of that kind.

1. This is here spoken of as one of their provoking sins, which would bring the judgments of God upon them, v. 9. "These evils shall come upon thee to punish thee for the multitude of thy sorceries, and the great abundance of thy enchantments." Witchcraft is a sin in its own nature exceedingly heinous; it is giving that honour to the devil which is due to God only, making God's enemy our guide and the father of lies our oracle. In Babylon it was a national sin, and had the protection and countenance of the government; conjurors, for aught that appears, were their privy counsellors and prime ministers of state. And shall not God visit for these things? Observe what a multitude, what a great abundance, of sorceries and enchantments there were among them. Such a bewitching sin this was that when it was once admitted it spread like wildfire, and they never knew any end of it; the deceived and the deceivers both increased strangely.

2. It is here spoken of as one of their vain confidences, which they relied much upon, but should be deceived in, for it would not serve so much as to give them notice of the judgments coming, much less to guard against them. (1.) They are here upbraided with the mighty pains they had taken about their sorceries and enchantments: Thou hast laboured in them from thy youth, v. 12. They trained up their young men in these studies, and those that applied themselves to them were indefatigable in their labours about them—reading books, making observations, trying experiments. Well, let them stand up now with their enchantments, and try their skill in the critical

moment. Let them make a stand, if they can, in opposition to the invading enemy; let them stand to offer their service to their country; but to what purpose? "*Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels* of this kind (v. 13); thou hast advised with them all, but hast received no satisfaction from them; the different schemes they have erected, and the different judgments they have given, have but increased thy perplexity and tired thee out." In the multitude of such counsellors there is no safety. (2.) They are upbraided with the variety they had of such kinds of people among them, v. 13. They had their *astrologers*, or viewers of the heavens, that did not consider them, as David, to behold the wisdom and power of God in them; but, under pretence of foretelling future events by them, they viewed the heavens and forgot him that made them and set their dominion on the earth (Job xxxviii. 33), and has himself dominion over them, for he rides on the heavens. They had their *star-gazers*, who by the motions of the stars, their conjunctions and oppositions, read the doom of states and kingdoms. They had their *monthly prognosticators*, their almanac-makers, that told what weather it should be or what news they should have each month. The great stock they had of these was what they valued themselves much upon; but they were all cheats, and their art was a sham. I confess I see not how the judicial astrology which some now pretend to, by the rules of which they undertake to prophecy concerning things to come, can be distinguished from that of the Chaldeans, nor therefore how it can escape the censure and contempt which this text lays that under; yet I fear there are some who study their almanacs, and regard them and their prognostications, more than their Bibles and the prophecies there. (3.) They are upbraided with the utter inability and insufficiency of all these pretenders to do them any kindness in the day of their distress. Let them see whether with the help of their enchantments they can prevail against their enemies, or profit themselves, inspirit their own forces or dispirit those that come against them, v. 12. Let them see what service those can do them who make a trade of divination: "*Let them stand up*, and either by their power save thee from these evils that are coming upon thee or by their foresight make such a discovery of them beforehand that thou mayest by needful precautions save thyself;" as Elisha, by notifying to the king of Israel the motions of the Syrian army, enabled him to save himself, not once nor twice, 2 Kings vi. 10. This baffling of the diviners was literally fulfilled when, the night that Babylon was taken and Belshazzar slain, all his astrologers, soothsayers, and wise men, were quite nonplussed with the handwriting on the wall that pro-



nounced the fatal sentence, Dan. v. 8. (4.) They are upbraided with the fall of the wise men themselves in the common ruin, v. 14. Those are unlikely to stand their friends in any stead who cannot secure themselves; they are as stubble at the best, worthless and useless, and *they shall be as stubble before a consuming fire*. The Persians, to make room for their own wise men, will cut off those of Babylon; that *fire shall burn them, and they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame*. Those can expect no other than to be devoured who by their sins make themselves fuel to a devouring fire. When God kindles a fire among them it *shall not be a coal to warm at, and a fire to sit before*, but a coal to burn them. Or, rather, it denotes that they shall be utterly consumed by the judgments of God, burnt quite to ashes, and there shall not remain one live coal to do any body any service; for *when God judges he will overcome*. (5.) They are upbraided with their merchants, and those they dealt with (v. 15), such as they dealt with from their youth, either, [1.] In a way of consultation. These astrologers, that dealt in the black art, they always loved to be dealing with, and they were in effect their merchants; fortune-telling was one of the best trades in Babylon, and those that followed that trade probably lived as splendidly and got as much money as the richest merchants; yet, when some of them were devoured, others fled their country, *every one to his quarter*, and there was none to save Babylon. Miserable comforters are they all. Or, [2.] In a way of commerce. As their astrologers, with whom they had laboured, failed them, so did their merchants; they took care to secure their own effects, and then valued not what became of Babylon. *They wandered every one to his own quarter*; each man shifted for his own safety, but none would offer to lend a helping hand, no, not to a city by which they had got so much money. Every one was for himself, but few for his friends. The New-Testament Babylon is lamented by the merchants that were made rich by her, but they very prudently stand afar off to lament her (Rev. xviii. 15), not willing to attempt any thing for her succour. Happy are those who by faith and prayer deal with one that will be a *very present help in time of trouble*!

## CHAP. XLVIII.

God, having in the foregoing chapter reckoned with the Babylonians, and shown them their sins and the desolation that was coming upon them for their sins, to show that he hates sin wherever he finds it and will not connive at it in his own people, comes, in this chapter, to show the house of Jacob their sins, but, withal, the mercy God had in store for them notwithstanding; and he therefore sets their sins in order before them, that by their repentance and reformation they might be prepared for that mercy. I. He charges them with hypocrisy in that which is good and obstinacy in that which is evil, especially in their idolatry, notwithstanding the many convincing proofs God had given them that he is God alone, ver. 1-8. II. He assures them that their deliverance would be wrought purely for the sake of God's own name and not for any merit of theirs, ver. 9-11. III. He encourages them to depend purely upon God's power and promise for this

deliverance, ver. 12-15. IV. He shows them that, as it was by 'their own sin that they brought themselves into captivity, so it would be only by the grace of God that they would obtain the necessary preparatives for their enlargement, ver. 16-19. V. He proclaims their release, yet with a proviso that the wicked shall have no benefit by it, ver. 20-22.

**H**EAR ye this, O house of Jacob, which are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah, which swear by the name of the LORD, and make mention of the God of Israel, *but not in truth, nor in righteousness*. 2 For they call themselves of the holy city, and stay themselves upon the God of Israel; the LORD of hosts *is* his name. 3 I have declared the former things from the beginning; and they went forth out of my mouth, and I showed them; I did *them* suddenly, and they came to pass. 4 Because I knew that thou *art* obstinate, and thy neck *is* an iron sinew, and thy brow brass; 5 I have even from the beginning declared *it* to thee; before it came to pass I showed *it* thee: lest thou shouldest say, Mine idol hath done them, and my graven image, and my molten image, hath commanded them. 6 Thou hast heard, see all this; and will not ye declare *it*? I have showed thee new things from this time, even hidden things, and thou didst not know them. 7 They are created now, and not from the beginning; even before the day when thou heardest them not; lest thou shouldest say, Behold, I knew them. 8 Yea, thou heardest not; yea, thou knewest not; yea, from that time *that* thine ear was not opened: for I knew that thou wouldest deal very treacherously, and wast called a transgressor from the womb.

We may observe here,

I. The hypocritical profession which many of the Jews made of religion and relation to God. To those who made such a profession the prophet is here ordered to address himself, for their conviction and humiliation, that they might own God's justice in what he had brought upon them. Now observe here,

1. How high their profession of religion soared, what a fair show they made in the flesh and how far they went towards heaven, what a good livery they wore and what a good face they put upon a very bad heart. (1.) They were the *house of Jacob*; they had a place and a name in the visible

church. *Jacob have I loved.* Jacob is God's chosen; and they are not only retainers to his family, but descendants from him. (2.) They were called by the name of Israel, an honourable name; they were of that people to whom pertained both the giving of the law and the promises. *Israel* signifies a prince with God; and they prided themselves in being of that princely race. (3.) *They came forth out of the waters of Judah*, and thence were called *Jews*; they were of the royal tribe, the tribe of which Shiloh was to come, the tribe that adhered to God when the rest revolted. (4.) They swore by the name of the Lord, and thereby owned him to be the true God, and their God, and gave glory to him as the righteous Judge of all. They swore to the name of the Lord (so it may be read); they took an oath of allegiance to him as their King and joined themselves to him in covenant. (5.) They made mention of the God of Israel in their prayers and praises; they often spoke of him, observed his memorials, and pretended to be very mindful of him. (6.) They called themselves of the holy city, and when they were captives in Babylon, purely from a principle of honour, and jealousy for their native country, they valued themselves upon their interest in it. Many, who are themselves unholy, are proud of their relation to the church, the holy city. (7.) They stayed themselves upon the God of Israel, and boasted of his promises and his covenant with them; they leaned on the Lord, Mic. iii. 11. And, if they were asked concerning their God, they could say, "*The Lord of hosts is his name*, the Lord of all;" happy are we therefore, and very great, who have relation to him!

2. How low their profession of religion sunk, notwithstanding all this. It was all in vain; for it was all a jest; it was not in truth and righteousness. Their hearts were not true nor right in these professions. Note, All our religious professions avail nothing further than they are made in truth and righteousness. If we be not sincere in them, we do but take the name of the Lord our God in vain.

II. The means God used, and the method he took, to keep them close to himself, and to prevent their turning aside to idolatry. The many excellent laws he gave them, with their sanctions, and the hedges about them, it seems, would not serve to restrain them from that sin which did most easily beset them, and therefore to those God added remarkable prophecies, and remarkable providences in pursuance of those prophecies, which were all designed to convince them that their God was the only true God and that it was therefore both their duty and interest to adhere to him. 1. He both dignified and favoured them with remarkable prophecies (v. 3). *I have declared the former things from the beginning.* Nothing material happened to their nation from its original

which was not prophesied of before—their bondage in Egypt, their deliverance thence, the situation of their tribes in Canaan, &c. All these things went forth out of God's mouth and he showed them. Herein they were honoured above any nation, and even their curiosity was gratified. Their prophecies were such as they could rely upon, and such as concerned themselves and their own nation; and they were all verified by the accomplishment of them. *I did them suddenly*, when they were least expected by themselves or others, and therefore could not be foreseen by any but a divine prescience. *I did them and they came to pass*; for what God does he does effectually. The very calamities they were now groaning under in Babylon God did from the beginning declare to them by Moses, as the certain consequences of their apostasy from God, Lev. xxvi. 31, &c.; Deut. xxviii. 36, &c.; xxix. 28. He also declared to them their return to God, and to their own land again, Deut. xxx. 4, &c.; Lev. xxvi. 44, 45. Thus he showed them how he would deal with them long before it came to pass. Let them compare their present state together with the deliverance they had now in prospect with what was written in the law, and they would find the scripture exactly fulfilled. 2. He both dignified and favoured them with remarkable providences (v. 6): *I have shown thee new things from this time.* Besides the general view given from the beginning of God's proceedings with them, he showed them new things by the prophets of their own day, and created them. They were *hidden things*, which they could not otherwise know, as the prophecy concerning Cyrus and the exact time of their release out of Babylon. These things God created now, v. 7. Their restoration was in effect their creation, and they had a promise of it not from the beginning, but of late; for to prevent their apostasy from God, or to recover them, prophecy was kept up among them. Yet it was told them when they could not come to the knowledge of it in any other way than by divine revelation. "Consider," says God, "how much soever it is talked of now among you and expected, it was told you by the prophets, when it was the furthest thing from your thoughts, when you had not heard it, when you had not known it, nor had any reason to expect it, and when your ear was not opened concerning it (v. 7, 8), when the thing seemed utterly impossible, and you would scarcely have given any one the hearing who should have told you of it." God had shown them hidden things which were out of the reach of their knowledge, and done for them great things, out of the reach of their power: "Now," says he (v. 6), "*thou hast heard; see all this.*" Thou hast heard the prophecy; see the accomplishment of it, and observe whether the word and works of God do not



exactly agree; and will you not declare it, that as you have heard so you have seen? Will you not own that the Lord is the true God, the only true God, that he has the knowledge and power which no creature has and which none of the gods of the nations can pretend to? Will you not own that your God has been a good God to you? Declare this to his honour, and your own shame, who have dealt so deceitfully with him and preferred others before him."

III. The reasons why God would take this method with them.

1. Because he would anticipate their boastings of themselves and their idols. (1.) God by his prophets told them beforehand of their deliverance, lest they should attribute the accomplishment of it to their idols. Thus he saw it necessary to secure the glory of it to himself, which otherwise would have been given by some of them to their graven images: "I spoke of it," says God, "*lest thou shouldst say, My idol has done it or has commanded it to be done,*" v. 5. There were those that would be apt to say so, and so would be confirmed in their idolatry by that which was intended to cure them of it. But they would now be for ever precluded from saying this; for, if the idols had done it, the prophets of the idols would have foretold it; but, the prophets of the Lord having foretold it, it was no doubt the power of the Lord that effected it. (2.) God foretold it by his prophets, lest they should assume the foresight of it to themselves. Those that were not so profane as to have ascribed the thing itself to an idol were yet so proud as to have pretended that by their own sagacity they foresaw it, if God had not been beforehand with them and spoken first: *Lest thou shouldst say, Behold, I knew them,* v. 7. Thus vain men, who would be thought wise, commonly undervalue a thing which is really great and surprising with this suggestion, that it was no more than they expected and they knew it would come to this. To anticipate this, and that this boasting might for ever be excluded, God told them of it before the day, when as yet they dreamed not of it. God has said and done enough to prevent men's boastings of themselves, and that *no flesh may glory in his presence*, and, if it have not the intended effect, it will aggravate the sin and ruin of the proud; and, sooner or later, *every mouth shall be stopped, and all flesh shall become silent before God.*

2. Because he would leave them inexcusable in their obstinacy. *Therefore* he took this pains with them, because he knew they were obstinate, v. 4. He knew they were so obstinate and perverse that, if he had not supported the doctrine of providence by prophecy, they would have had the impudence to deny it, and would have said that their idol had done that which God did. He knew very well, (1.) How

wilful they would be, and how fully bent they would be upon that which is evil: *I knew that thou wast hard*; so the word is. There were prophecies as well as precepts which God gave them because of the hardness of their hearts: "*Thy neck is an iron sinew*, unapt to yield and submit to the yoke of God's commandments, unapt to turn and look back upon his dealings with thee or look up to his displeasure against thee; not flexible to the will of God, nor pliable to his intentions, nor manageable by his word or providence. *Thy brow is brass*; thou art impudent and canst not blush, insolent and wilt not fear or give back, but wilt thrust on in the way of thy heart." God uses means to bring sinners to comply with him, though he knows they are obstinate. (2.) How deceitful they would be and how insincere in that which is good, v. 8. God sent his prophets to them, but they did not hear, they would not know, and it was no more than was expected, considering what they had been. *Thou wast called*, and not miscalled, *a transgressor from the womb*. Ever since they were first formed into a people they were prone to idolatry; they brought with them out of Egypt a strange addictedness to that sin; and they were murmurers as soon as ever they began their march to Canaan. They were justly upbraided with it then, Deut. ix. 7, 24. *Therefore I knew that thou wouldst deal very treacherously*. God foresaw their apostasy, and gave this reason for it, that he had always found them false and fickle, Deut. xxxi. 16, 27, 29. This is applicable to particular persons. We are all born children of disobedience; we were called *transgressors from the womb*, and therefore it is easy to foresee that we shall deal treacherously, very treacherously. Where original sin is actual sin will follow of course. God knows it, and yet deals not with us according to our deserts.

9 For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off. 10 Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction. 11 For mine own sake, *even* for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should *my name* be polluted? And I will not give my glory unto another. 12 Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; *I am* he; *I am* the first, I also *am* the last. 13 Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens: *when* I call unto them, they stand up together. 14 All ye, assemble yourselves,

and hear; which among them hath declared these things? The LORD hath loved him: he will do his pleasure on Babylon, and his arm shall be on the Chaldeans. 15 I, even I, have spoken; yea, I have called him: I have brought him, and he shall make his way prosperous.

The deliverance of God's people out of their captivity in Babylon was a thing upon many accounts so improbable that there was need of line upon line for the encouragement of the faith and hope of God's people concerning it. Two things were discouraging to them—their own unworthiness that God should do it for them and the many difficulties in the thing itself; now, in these verses, both these discouragements are removed, for here is,

I. A reason why God would do it for them, though they were unworthy; not for their sake, be it known to them, but for his name's sake, for his own sake, v. 9—11.

1. It is true they had been very provoking, and God had been justly angry with them. Their captivity was the punishment of their iniquity; and if, when he had them in Babylon, he had left them to pine away and perish there, and made the desolations of their country perpetual, he would only have dealt with them according to their sins, and it was what such a sinful people might expect from an angry God. "But," says God, "*I will defer my anger*" (or, rather, *stifle and suppress it*); "*I will make it appear that I am slow to wrath, and will refrain from thee, not pour upon thee what I justly might, that I should cut thee off from being a people.*" And why will God thus stay his hand? *For my name's sake*; because this people was called by his name, and made profession of his name, and, if they were cut off, the enemies would blaspheme his name. *It is for my praise*; because it would redound to the honour of his mercy to spare and relieve them, and, if he continued them to be to him a people, they might be to him for a name and a praise.

2. It is true they were very corrupt and ill-disposed, but God would himself refine them, and make them fit for the mercy he intended for them: "*I have refined thee, that thou mightest be made a vessel of honour.*" Though he does not find them meet for his favour, he will make them so. And this accounts for his bringing them into the trouble, and continuing them in it so long as he did. It was not to cut them off, but to do them good. It was to refine them, but not as silver, or with silver, not so thoroughly as men refine their silver, which they continue in the furnace till all the dross is separated from it; if God should take that course with them, they would be always in the furnace, for they are all dross, and,

as such, might justly be put away (Ps. cxix. 119) as reprobate silver, Jer. vi. 30. He therefore takes them as they are, refined in part only, and not thoroughly. "*I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction*, that is, I have made thee a choice one by the good which the affliction has done thee, and then designed thee for great things." Many have been brought home to God as chosen vessels and a good work of grace has been begun in them in the furnace of affliction. Affliction is no bar to God's choice, but subservient to his purpose.

3. It is true they could not pretend to merit at God's hand so great a favour as their deliverance out of Babylon, which would put such an honour upon them and bring them so much joy; therefore, says God, *For my own sake, even for my own sake, will I do it*, v. 11. See how the emphasis is laid upon that; for it is a reason that cannot fail, and therefore the resolution grounded upon it cannot fall to the ground. God will do it, not because he owes them such a favour, but to save the honour of his own name, that that may not be polluted by the insolent triumphs of the heathen, who, in triumphing over Israel, thought they triumphed over the God of Israel and imagined their gods too hard for him. This was plainly the language of Belshazzar's revels, when he profaned the holy vessels of God's temple at the same time that he praised his idols (Dan. v. 2, 4), and of the Babylonians' demand (Ps. cxxxvii. 3), *Sing us one of the songs of Zion*. God will therefore deliver his people, because he will not suffer his glory to be thus given to another. Moses pleaded this often with God: Lord, *what will the Egyptians say?* Note, God is jealous for the honour of his own name, and will not suffer the wrath of man to proceed any further than he will make it turn to his praise. And it is matter of comfort to God's people that, whatever becomes of them, God will secure his own honour; and, as far as is necessary to that, God will work deliverance for them.

II. Here is a proof that God could do it for them, though they were unable to help themselves and the thing seemed altogether impracticable. Let Jacob and Israel hearken to this, and believe it, and take the comfort of it. They are God's called, *called according to his purpose*, called by him out of Egypt (Hos. xi. 1) and now out of Babylon, a people whom with a distinguishing favour he calls by name, and to whom he calls. They are his called, for they are called to him, called by his name, and called his; and therefore he will look after them, and they may be assured that, as he will deliver them for his own sake, so he will deliver them by his own strength. They need not fear then, for, 1. He is God alone, and the eternal God (v. 12): "*I am he who can do what I will and will do what is best, he*



whom none can compare with, much less contend with. *I am the first; I also am the last.* Who can be too quick for him that is the first, or anticipate him? Who can be too hard for him that is the last, and will keep the field against all opposers, and will reign till they are all made his footstool? What room then is left to doubt of their deliverance when *he* undertakes it whose designs cannot but be well laid, for he is the first, and well executed, for he is the last. As for this God, his work is perfect. 2. He is the God that made the world, and he that did that can do any thing, v. 13. Look we down? We see the earth firm under us, and feel it so; it was his hand that *laid the foundation* of it. Look we up? We see the heavens spread out as a canopy over our heads, and it was his hand that spread them, that *spanned* them, that stretched them out, and did it by an exact measure, as the workman sometimes metes out his work by spans. This intimates that God has a vast reach and can compass designs of the greatest extent. *If the palm of his right hand* (so the margin reads it) has gone so far as to stretch out the heavens, what will he do with his outstretched arm? Yet this is not all: he has not only made the heavens and the earth, and therefore he in whom our hope and help is is omnipotent (Ps. cxxiv. 8), but he has the command of all the hosts of both; when he calls them into his service, to go on his errands, they stand up together, they come at the call, they answer to their names: "Here we are; what wilt thou have us to do?" They stand up, not only in reverence to their Creator, but in a readiness to execute his orders: *They stand up together*, unanimously concurring, and helping one another in the service of their Maker. If God therefore will deliver his people, he cannot be at a loss for instruments to be employed in effecting their deliverance. 3. He has already foretold it, and, having infinite knowledge, so that he foresaw it, no doubt he has almighty power to effect it: "*All you of the house of Jacob, assemble yourselves, and hear this for your comfort, Which among them, among the gods of the heathen, or their wise men, has declared these things, or could declare them?*" v. 14. They had no foresight of them at all, but those who consulted them were very confident that Babylon should be a lady for ever and Israel a perpetual slave; and their oracles did not give them the least hint to the contrary, to undeceive them; whereas God by his prophets had given notice to the Jews, long before, of their captivity and the destruction of Jerusalem, as he had now likewise given them notice of their release (v. 15): *I, even I, have spoken*; and he would not have spoken it if he could not have made it good: none could out-see him, and therefore we may be sure that none could outdo him. 4. The person is pitched

upon who is to be employed in this service, and the measures are concerted in the divine counsels, which are unalterable. Cyrus is the man who must do it; and it tends much to strengthen our assurance that a thing shall be done when we are particularly informed how and by whom. It is not left at uncertainty who shall do it, but the matter is fixed. (1.) It is one whom God is well pleased in, upon this account, because he is designed for this service: *The Lord has loved him* (v. 14); he has done him this favour, this honour, to make him an instrument in the redemption of his people and therein a type of the great Redeemer, God's beloved Son, *in whom he was well pleased*. Those God does a great kindness to, and has a great kindness for, whom he makes serviceable to his church. (2.) It is one to whom God will give authority and commission: *I have called him*, have given him a sufficient warrant, and therefore will bear him out. (3.) It is one whom God will by a series of providences lead to this service: "*I have brought him from a far country*, brought him to engage against Babylon, brought him step by step, quite beyond his own intentions." Whom God calls he will bring, will *cause them to come* (so the word is), to come at the call. (4.) It is one whom God will own and give success to. Cyrus will *do God's pleasure on Babylon*, that which it is his pleasure should be done and which he will be pleased with the doing of, though Cyrus has ends of his own to serve and has no regard either to the will of God or to his favour in the doing of it. *His arm* (Cyrus's army, and in it God's arm) *shall come, and be upon the Chaldeans*, to bring them down (v. 14); for, if God call him and bring him, he will certainly *make his way prosperous*, v. 15. Then we may hope to prosper in our way when we follow a divine call and guidance.

16 Come ye near unto me, hear ye this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there *am I*: and now the Lord God, and his Spirit, hath sent me. 17 Thus saith the LORD, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; *I am the LORD thy God* which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way *that* thou shouldest go. 18 O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea. 19 Thy seed also had been as the sand, and the offspring of thy bowels like the gravel thereof; his name should not have been cut off nor destroyed from before me. 20 Go ye

forth of Babylon, flee ye from the Chaldeans, with a voice of singing declare ye, tell this, utter it *even* to the end of the earth; say ye, The LORD hath redeemed his servant Jacob. 21 And they thirsted not *when* he led them through the deserts: he caused the waters to flow out of the rock for them: he clave the rock also, and the waters gushed out. 22 *There is* no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked.

Here, as before, Jacob and Israel are summoned to hearken to the prophet speaking in God's name, or rather to God speaking in and by the prophet, and that as a type of the great prophet by whom God has in these last days spoken unto us, and that is sufficient: *Come near* therefore, *and hear this*. Note, Those that would hear and understand what God says must come near, and approach to him; let them come as near as they can. Let those that have hearkened to the tempter now come near, and hear this, that they may be confirmed in their resolutions to serve God. Those that draw nigh to God may depend upon this, that his secret shall be with them. Here,

I. God refers them to what he had both said to them and done for them formerly, which if they would reflect upon, they might thence fetch great encouragement to trust in God at this time. 1. He had always spoken plainly to them *from the beginning*, by Moses and all the prophets: *I have not spoken in secret*, but publicly, from the top of Mount Sinai, and in the chief places of concourse, the solemn assemblies of their tribes; he did not deliver his oracles obscurely and ambiguously, but so that they might be understood, Hab. ii. 2. 2. He had always acted wonderfully for them: *"From the time that they were first formed into a people there am I, there have I been resident among them and presiding in their affairs (he sent them prophets, raised them up judges, and frequently appeared for them), and therefore there I will be still."* He that has been with his people hitherto will be to the end.

II. The prophet himself, as a type of the great prophet, asserts his own commission to deliver this message: *Now the Lord God* (the same that spoke from the beginning and did not speak in secret) *has by his Spirit sent me*, v. 16. The Spirit of God is here spoken of as a person distinct from the Father and the Son, and having a divine authority to send prophets. Note, Whom God sends the Spirit sends. Those whom God commissions for any service the Spirit in some measure qualifies for it; and those may speak boldly, and must be heard obediently, whom God and his Spirit send. As that which the prophet says to the same

purport with this (*ch. lxi. 1*) is applied to Christ (Luke iv. 21), so may this be; the Lord God sent him, and he had the Spirit without measure.

III. God by the prophet sends them a gracious message for their support and comfort under their affliction. The preface to this message is both awful and encouraging (v. 17): *Thus saith Jehovah*, the eternal God, *thy Redeemer*, that has often been so, that has engaged to be so, and will be faithful to the engagement, for he is *the Holy One*, that will not deceive, *the Holy One of Israel*, that will not deceive them. The same words that introduce the law, and give authority to that, introduce the promise, and give validity to that: *"I am the Lord thy God, whom thou mayest depend upon as in relation to thee and in covenant with thee."*

1. Here is the good work which God undertakes to fulfil in them. He that is their Redeemer, in order to that, will be, (1.) Their instructor: *"I am thy God that teaches thee to profit"*, that is, teaches thee such things as are profitable for thee, things that belong to thy peace." By this God shows himself to be a God in covenant with us, by his *teaching us* (Heb. viii. 10, 11); and none teaches like him, for he gives an understanding. Whom God redeems he teaches; whom he designs to deliver out of their afflictions he first teaches to profit by their afflictions, makes them partakers of his holiness, for that is the *profit for which he chastens us*, Heb. xii. 10. (2.) Their guide: *He leads them to the way and in the way by which they should go*. He not only enlightens their eyes, but directs their steps. By his grace he leads them in the way of duty, by his providence he leads them in the way of deliverance. Happy are those that are under such a guidance!

2. Here is the good-will which God declares he had for them by his good wishes concerning them, v. 18, 19. He had indeed brought them into captivity, but it was owing to themselves, nor did he afflict them willingly. (1.) As when he gave them his law he earnestly wished they might be obedient (*O that there were such a heart in them!* Deut. v. 29. *O that they were wise!* Deut. xxxii. 29), so, when he had punished them for the breach of his law, he wished they had been obedient: *O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments!* v. 18. *O that my people had hearkened unto me!* Ps. lxxxix. 13. This confirms what God had said and sworn, that he has *no pleasure in the death of sinners*. (2.) He assures them that, if they had been obedient, that would not only have prevented their captivity, but would have advanced and perpetuated their prosperity. He had abundance of good things ready to bestow upon them if their sins had not *turned them away*, *ch. lix. 1, 2*. [1.] They should have been carried on in a constant



uninterrupted stream of prosperity: "*Thy peace should have been as a river; thou shouldst have enjoyed a series of mercies, one continually following another, as the waters of a river, which always last.*" *Labitur, et labetur in omne volubilis ævum—It flows, and will for ever flow; not like the waters of a land-flood, which are soon gone.*

[2.] Their virtue and honour, and the justice of their cause, should in all cases have borne down opposition by their own strength, *as the waves of the sea.* Such should their righteousness have been that nothing should have stood before it; whereas, now they had been disobedient, the current of their prosperity was interrupted, and their righteousness overpowered. [3.] The rising generation should have been very numerous and very prosperous; whereas they were now very few, as appears by the small number of the returning captives (Ezra ii. 64), not so many as of one tribe when they came out of Egypt. They should have been *numberless as the sand*, according to the promise (Gen. xxii. 17), which they had forfeited the benefit of: "*The offspring of thy bowels would have been innumerable, like the gravel of the sea, if thy righteousness had been irresistible and unconquerable as the waves of the sea.*" [4.] The honour of Israel should still have been unstained, untouched: *His name should not have been cut off*, as now it is in the land of Israel, which is either desolate or inhabited by strangers; nor should it have been *destroyed from before God.* We cannot reckon the name either of a family or of a kingdom destroyed till it is destroyed from before God, till it ceases to be a name in his holy place. Now God tells them thus what he would have done for them if they had persevered in their obedience, *First*, that they might be the more humbled for their sins, by which they had forfeited such rich mercies. Note, *This* should engage us (I might say, enrage us) against sin, that it has not only deprived us of the good things we have enjoyed, but prevented the good things God had in store for us. It will make the misery of the disobedient the more intolerable to think how happy they might have been. *Secondly*, That his mercy might appear the more illustrious in working deliverance for them, though they had forfeited it and rendered themselves unworthy of it. Nothing but a prerogative of mercy would have saved them.

3. Here is assurance given of the great work which God designed to work for them, even their salvation out of their captivity, when he had accomplished his work in them.

(1.) Here is a commission granted them to leave Babylon. God proclaimed, long before Cyrus did, that whoever would might return to his own land (v. 20): "*You have a full discharge sent you: Go you forth out of Babylon; the prison-doors are thrown open, and the trumpet sounds, proclaiming*

a release." Perhaps with this word, as a means, the Spirit of the Lord stirred up the spirits of those that did take the benefit of Cyrus's proclamation (Ezra i. 5): *Flee you from the Chaldeans*, not with an ignominious stolen flight, as Jacob fled from Laban, but with a holy disdain, as scorning to stay any longer among them; flee you, not silently and sorrowfully, but with a voice, with a voice of singing, as they fled of old out of Egypt, Exod. xv. 1.

(2.) Here is the news of this sent to all parts: "Let it be declared; let it be told; let it be uttered; make it to be heard by the most remote, by the most remiss; send the tidings of it by word of mouth; send it by writing, from city to city, from kingdom to kingdom, even to the utmost regions, *to the ends of the earth.*" This was a figure of the publishing of the gospel to all the world; but that brings glad tidings which all the world is concerned in, this only that which it is fit all should take notice of, that they may be invited by it to forsake their idols and come into the service of the God of Israel. Let them all know then, [1.] That those whom God owns for his are such as he has dearly bought and paid for: *The Lord has redeemed his servant Jacob*; he has done it formerly, when he brought them out of Egypt, and now he is about to do it again. Jacob was God's servant, and therefore he redeemed him; for what had other masters to do with God's servants? Israel is God's son, therefore Pharaoh must let him go. God redeemed Jacob, and therefore it was fit that he should be his servant (Ps. cxvi. 16); the bonds God had loosed tied them the faster to him. He that redeemed us has an unquestionable right to us. [2.] That those whom God designs to bring home to himself he will take care of, that they want not for the necessary expenses of their journey. When he brought them out of Egypt, and *led them through the deserts, they thirsted not* (v. 21), for in all their removals the water out of the rock followed them; thence *he caused the waters to flow*, and, since rock-water is the clearest and finest, *God clave the rock, and the waters gushed out*; for he can fetch in necessary supplies for his people in a way that they think the least likely. This refers to what he did for them when he brought them out of Egypt; when all this was literally true. But it should now be in effect done again, in their return out of Babylon, so well provided for should they and theirs be in their return. God does his work as effectually by marvellous providences as by miracles, though perhaps they are not so much taken notice of. This is applicable to those treasures of grace laid up for us in Jesus Christ, from which all good flows to us as the water did to Israel out of the rock, for that rock is Christ.

(3.) Here is a caveat put in against the wicked who go on still in their trespasses.

Let not them think to have any benefit among God's people. Though in show and profession they herd themselves among them, let them not expect to come in sharers; no (v. 22), though God's thoughts concerning the body of that people were thoughts of peace, yet to those among them that were *wicked* and hated to be reformed *there is no peace*, no peace with God or their own consciences, no real good, whatever is pretended to. What have those to do with peace who are enemies to God? Their false prophets cried Peace to those to whom it did not belong; but God tells them that there shall be no peace, nor any thing like it, to the wicked. The quarrel sinners have commenced with God, if not taken up in time by repentance, will be an everlasting quarrel.

## CHAP. XLIX.

Glorious things had been spoken in the previous chapters concerning the deliverance of the Jews out of Babylon; but lest any should think, when it was accomplished, that it looked much greater and brighter in the prophecy than in the performance, and that the return of about 40,000 Jews in a poor condition out of Babylon to Jerusalem was not an event sufficiently answering to the height and grandeur of the expressions used in the prophecy, he here comes to show that the prophecy had a further intension, and was to have its full accomplishment in a redemption that should as far outdo these expressions as the other seemed to come short of them, even the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ, of whom not only Cyrus, who was God's servant in working the Jews' deliverance, but Isaiah too, who was God's servant in foretelling it, was a type. In this chapter we have, I. The designation of Christ, under the type of Isaiah, to his office as Mediator, ver. 1—3. II. The assurance given him of the success of his undertaking among the Gentiles, ver. 4—8. III. The redemption that should be wrought by him, and the progress of that redemption, ver. 9—12. IV. The encouragement given hence to the afflicted church, ver. 13—17. V. The addition of many to it, and the setting up of a church among the Gentiles, ver. 18—23. VI. A ratification of the prophecy of the Jews' release out of Babylon, which was to be the figure and type of all these blessings, ver. 24—25. If this chapter be rightly understood, we shall see ourselves to be more concerned in the prophecies relating to the Jews' deliverance out of Babylon than we thought we were.

**L**ISTEN, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far; The LORD hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name. 2 And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me; 3 And said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified. 4 Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the LORD, and my work with my God. 5 And now, saith the LORD that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and my God shall be my strength. 6 And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my

servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.

Here, I. An auditory is summoned together and attention demanded. The sermon in the foregoing chapter was directed to the house of Jacob and the people of Israel, v. 1, 12. But this is directed to the isles (that is, the Gentiles, for they are called *the isles of the Gentiles*, Gen. x. 5) and to the people from far, that were *strangers to the commonwealth of Israel*, and afar off. Let these listen (v. 1) as to a thing at a distance, which yet they are to hear with desire and attention. Note, 1. The tidings of a Redeemer are sent to the Gentiles, and to those that lie most remote; and they are concerned to listen to them. 2. The Gentiles listened to the gospel when the Jews were deaf to it.

II. The great author and publisher of the redemption produces his authority from heaven for the work he had undertaken. 1. God had appointed him and set him apart for it: *The Lord has called me from the womb to this office and made mention of my name*, nominated me to be the Saviour. By an angel he called him *Jesus—a Saviour*, who should save his people from their sins, Matt. i. 21. Nay, from the womb of the divine counsels, before all worlds, he was called to this service, and help was laid upon him; and he came at the call, for he said, *Lo, I come*, with an eye to what was written of him in the volume of the book. This was said of some of the prophets, as types of him, Jer. i. 5. Paul was separated to the apostleship from his mother's womb, Gal. i. 15. 2. God had fitted and qualified him for the service to which he designed him. He made his mouth like a sharp sword, and made him like a polished shaft, or a bright arrow, furnished him with every thing necessary to fight God's battles against the powers of darkness, to conquer Satan, and bring back God's revolted subjects to their allegiance, by his word: that is the *two-edged sword* (Heb. iv. 12) which comes out of his mouth, Rev. xix. 15. The convictions of the word are the arrows that shall be sharp in the hearts of sinners, Ps. xlv. 5. 3. God had preferred him to the service for which he had reserved him: *He has hidden me in the shadow of his hand* and in his quiver, which denotes, (1.) Concealment. The gospel of Christ, and the calling in of the Gentiles by it, were long hidden from ages and generations, hidden in God (Eph. iii. 5, Rom. xvi. 25), hidden in the shadow of the ceremonial law and the Old-Testament types. (2.) Protection. The house of David was the particular care of the divine Providence, because that blessing was in it.



Christ in his infancy was sheltered from the rage of Herod. 4. God had owned him, had said unto him, "*Thou art my servant, whom I have employed and will prosper; thou art Israel, in effect, the prince with God, that hast wrestled and prevailed; and in thee I will be glorified.*" The people of God are *Israel*, and they are all gathered together, and summed up, as it were, in Christ, the great representative of all Israel, as the high priest who had the names of all the tribes on his breastplate; and in him God is and will be glorified; so he said by a voice from heaven, John xii. 27, 28. Some read the words in two clauses: *Thou art my servant* (so Christ is, ch. xlii. 1); *it is Israel in whom I will be glorified by thee*; it is the spiritual Israel, the elect, in the salvation of whom by Jesus Christ God will be glorified, and his free grace for ever admired.

III. He is assured of the good success of his undertaking; for whom God calls he will prosper. And as to this,

1. He objects the discouragement he had met with at his first setting out (v. 4): "Then I said, with a sad heart, *I have laboured in vain*; those that were ignorant, and careless, and strangers to God, are so still: *I have called, and they have refused; I have stretched out my hands to a gainsaying people.*" This was Isaiah's complaint, but it was no more than he was told to expect, ch. vi. 9. The same was a temptation to Jeremiah to resolve he would labour no more, Jer. xx. 9. It is the complaint of many a faithful minister, that has not loitered, but laboured, not spared, but spent, his strength, and himself with it, and yet, as to many, it is all in vain and for nought; they will not be prevailed with to repent and believe. But here it seems to point at the obstinacy of the Jews, among whom Christ went in person preaching the gospel of the kingdom, laboured and spent his strength, and yet the rulers and the body of the nation rejected him and his doctrine; so very few were brought in, when one would think none should have stood out, that he might well say, "*I have laboured in vain*, preached so many sermons, wrought so many miracles, in vain." Let not the ministers think it strange that they are slighted when the Master himself was.

2. He comforts himself under this discouragement with this consideration, that it was the cause of God in which he was engaged and the call of God that engaged him in it: *Yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, who is the Judge of all, and my work with my God, whose servant I am.* His comfort is, and it may be the comfort of all faithful ministers, when they see little success of their labours, (1.) That, however it be, it is a righteous cause that they are pleading. They are with God, and for God; they are on his side, and workers together with him. They like not their judgment, the rule they go by, nor their work,

the business they are employed in, ever the worse for this. The unbelief of men gives them no cause to suspect the truth of their doctrine, Rom. iii. 3. (2.) That their management of this cause, and their prosecution of this work, were known to God, and they could appeal to him concerning their sincerity, and that it was not through any neglect of theirs that they laboured in vain. *He knows the way that I take; my judgment is with the Lord*, to determine whether I have not delivered my soul and left the blood of those that perish on their own heads."

(3.) Though the labour be in vain as to those that are laboured with, yet not as to the labourer himself, if he be faithful: his judgment is with the Lord, who will justify him and bear him out, though men condemn him and run him down; and his work (the reward of his work) is with his God, who will take care he shall be no loser, no, not by his lost labour. (4.) Though the judgment be not yet brought forth unto victory, nor the work to perfection, yet both are with the Lord, to carry them on and give them success, according to his purpose, in his own way and time.

3. He receives from God a further answer to this objection, v. 5, 6. He knew very well that God had set him on work, had *formed him from the womb to be his servant*, had not only called him so early to it (v. 1), but begun so early to fit him for it and dispose him to it. Those whom God designs to employ as his servants he is fashioning and preparing to be so long before, when perhaps neither themselves nor others are aware of it. It is he that forms the spirit of man within him. Christ was to be *his servant, to bring Jacob again to him*, that had treacherously departed from him. The seed of Jacob therefore, according to the flesh, must first be dealt with, and means used to bring them back. Christ, and the word of salvation by him, are sent to them first; nay, Christ comes in person to them only, *to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*. But what if Jacob will not be brought back to God and Israel will not be gathered? So it proved; but this is a satisfaction in that case, (1.) Christ will be glorious in the eyes of the Lord; and those are truly glorious that are so in God's eyes. Though few of the Jewish nation were converted by Christ's preaching and miracles, and many of them loaded him with ignominy and disgrace, yet God put honour upon him, and made him glorious, at his baptism, and in his transfiguration, spoke to him from heaven, sent angels to minister to him, made even his shameful death glorious by the many prodigies that attended it, much more his resurrection. In his sufferings God was his strength, so that though he met with all the discouragement imaginable, by the contempts of a people whom he had done so much to oblige, yet he *did not fail nor was*



discouraged. An angel was sent from heaven to strengthen him, Luke xxii. 43. Faithful ministers, though they see not the fruit of their labours, shall yet be accepted of God, and in that they shall be truly glorious, for his favour is our honour; and they shall be assisted to proceed and persevere in their labours notwithstanding. This weakens their hands, but their God will be their strength.

(2.) The gospel shall be glorious in the eyes of the world; though it be not so in the eyes of the Jews, yet it shall be entertained by the nations, v. 6. The Messiah seemed as if he had been primarily designed to bring Jacob back, v. 5. But he is here told that it is comparatively but a small matter; a higher orb of honour than that, and a larger sphere of usefulness, are designed him: "It is a light thing that thou shouldst be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob to the dignity and dominion they expect by the Messiah, and to restore the preserved of Israel, and make them a flourishing church and state as formerly" (nay, considering what a little handful of people they are, it would be but a small matter, in comparison, for the Messiah to be the Saviour of them only); "and therefore I will give thee for a light to the Gentiles (many great and mighty nations by the gospel of Christ shall be brought to the knowledge and worship of the true God), that thou mayest be my salvation, the author of that salvation which I have designed for lost man, and this to the end of the earth, to nations at the greatest distance." Hence Simeon learned to call Christ a light to lighten the Gentiles (Luke ii. 32), and St. Paul's exposition of this text is what we ought to abide by, and it serves for a key to the context, Acts xiii. 47. Therefore, says he, we turn to the Gentiles, to preach the gospel to them, because so has the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light to the Gentiles. In this the Redeemer was truly glorious, though Israel was not gathered; the setting up of his kingdom in the Gentile world was more his honour than if he had raised up all the tribes of Jacob. This promise is in part fulfilled already, and will have a further accomplishment, if that time be yet to come which the apostle speaks of, when the fulness of the Gentiles shall be brought in. Observe, God calls it his salvation, which some think intimates how well pleased he was with it, how he gloried in it, and (if I may so say) how much his heart was upon it. They further observe that Christ is given for a light to all those to whom he is given for salvation. It is in darkness that men perish. Christ enlightens men's eyes, and so makes them holy and happy.

7 Thus saith the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and

arise, princes also shall worship, because of the LORD that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee. 8 Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; 9 That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Show yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places. 10 They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them. 11 And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted. 12 Behold, these shall come from far: and, lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim.

In these verses we have,

I. The humiliation and exaltation of the Messiah (v. 7): *The Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and Israel's Holy One*, who had always taken care of the Jewish church and wrought out for them those deliverances that were typical of the great salvation, speaks here to him, who was the undertaker of that salvation. And, 1. He takes notice of his humiliation, the instances of which were uncommon, nay, unparalleled. He was one whom man despised. He is despised and rejected of men, ch. liii. 3. To be despised by so mean a creature (man, who is himself a worm) bespeaks the lowest and most contemptible condition imaginable. Man, whom he came to save and to put honour upon, yet despised him and put contempt upon him; so wretchedly ungrateful were his persecutors. The ignominy he underwent was not the least of his sufferings. They not only made him despicable, but odious. He was one whom the nation abhorred; they treated him as the worst of men, and cried out, Crucify him, crucify him. The nation did it, the Gentiles as well as Jews, and the Jews herein worse than Gentiles; for his cross was to the one a stumbling-block and to the other foolishness. He was a servant of rulers; he was trampled upon, abused, scourged, and crucified as a slave. Pilate boasted of his power over him, John xix. 10. This he submitted to for our salvation. 2. He promises him his exaltation. Honour was done him



even in the depth of his humiliation. Herod the king stood in awe of him, saying, *It is John the Baptist*; noblemen, rulers, centurions came and kneeled to him. But this was more fully accomplished when kings received his gospel, and submitted to his yoke, and joined in the worship of him, and called themselves the vassals of Christ. Not that Christ values the rich more than the poor (they stand upon a level with him), but it is for the honour of his kingdom among men when the great ones of the earth appear for him and do homage to him. This shall be the accomplishment of God's promise, and he will give him the heathen for his inheritance, and *therefore* it shall be done, *because of the Lord who is faithful* and true to his promise; and this shall be an evidence that Christ had a commission for what he did, and that God had chosen him, and would own the choice he had made.

II. The blessings he has in store for all those to whom he is made salvation.

1. God will own and stand by him in his undertaking (v. 8): *In an acceptable time have I heard thee*, that is, I will hear thee. Christ, *in the days of his flesh, offered up strong cries, and was heard*, Heb. v. 7. He knew that the *Father heard him always* (John xi. 42), heard him for himself (for, though the cup might not pass from him, yet he was enabled to drink it), heard him for all that are his, and therefore he interceded for them as one having authority. *Father, I will*, John xvii. 24. All our happiness results from the Son's interest in the Father and the prevalency of his intercession, that he always heard him; and this makes the gospel time an acceptable time, welcome to us, because we are accepted of God, both reconciled and recommended to him, that God hears the Redeemer for us, Heb. vii. 25. Nor will he hear him only, but help him to go through with his undertaking. The Father was always with him at his right hand, and did not leave him when his disciples did. Violent attacks were made upon our Lord Jesus by the powers of darkness, when it was their hour, to drive him off from his undertakings, but God promises to preserve him and enable him to persevere in it; on that *one stone were seven eyes*, Zech. iii. 9. God would preserve him, would preserve his interest, his kingdom among men, though fought against on all sides. Christ is preserved while Christianity is.

2. God will authorize him to apply to his church the benefits of the redemption he is to work out. God's preserving and helping him was to make the day of his gospel a day of salvation. And so the apostle understands it: *Behold, now is the day of salvation*, now the word of reconciliation by Christ is preached, 2 Cor. vi. 2.

(1.) He shall be guarantee of the treaty of peace between God and man: I will *give thee for a covenant of the people*. This we

had before (ch. xlii. 6), and it is here repeated as faithful, and well worthy of all acceptance and observation. He is given for a covenant, that is, for a pledge of all the blessings of the covenant. It was in him that God was *reconciling the world to himself*; and he that *spared not his own Son* will deny us nothing. He is given for a covenant, not only as he is the Mediator of the covenant, the blessed *days-man who has laid his hand upon us both*, but as he is all in all in the covenant. All the duty of the covenant is summed up in our being his; and all the privilege and happiness of the covenant are summed up in his being ours.

(2.) He shall repair the decays of the church and build it upon a rock. He shall *establish the earth*, or rather the *land*, the land of Judea, a type of the church. He shall *cause the desolate heritages to be inherited*; so the cities of Judah were after the return out of captivity, and so the church, which in the last and degenerate ages of the Jewish nation had been as a country laid waste, but was again replenished by the fruits of the preaching of the gospel.

(3.) He shall free the souls of men from the bondage of guilt and corruption and bring them into the glorious liberty of God's children. He shall *say to the prisoners* that were bound over to the justice of God, and bound under the power of Satan, *Go forth*, v. 9. Pardoning mercy is a release from the curse of the law, and renewing grace is a release from the dominion of sin. Both are from Christ, and are branches of the great salvation. It is he that says, *Go forth*; it is the Son that makes us free, and then we are free indeed. He saith to *those that are in darkness, Show yourselves*; "not only see, but be seen, to the glory of God and your own comfort." When he discharged the lepers from their confinement, he said, *Go show yourselves to the priest*. When we see the light, let our light shine.

(4.) He shall provide for the comfortable passage of those whom he sets at liberty to the place of their rest and happy settlement, v. 9—11. These verses refer to the provision made for the Jews' return out of their captivity, who were taken under the particular care of the divine Providence, as favourites of Heaven, and now so in a special manner; but they are applicable to that guidance of divine grace which all God's spiritual Israel are under, from their release out of bondage to their settlement in the heavenly Canaan. [1.] They shall have their charges borne and shall be fed at free cost with food convenient: *They shall feed in the ways*, as sheep; for now, as formerly, *God leads Joseph like a flock*. When God pleases even highway ground shall be good ground for the sheep of his pasture to feed in. Their pastures shall be not only in the valleys, but in *all high places*, which are commonly dry and barren. Wherever God



brings his people he will take care they shall want nothing that is good for them, Ps. xxxiv. 10. And so well shall they be provided for that they shall not hunger nor thirst, for what they need they shall have seasonably, before their need of it comes to an extremity. [2.] They shall be sheltered and protected from every thing that would incommode them: *Neither shall the heat nor sun smite them*, for God causes his flock to rest at noon, Cant. i. 7. No evil thing shall befall those that put themselves under a divine protection; they shall be enabled to bear the burden and heat of the day. [3.] They shall be under God's gracious guidance: *He that has mercy on them*, in bringing them out of their captivity, shall lead them, as he did their fathers in the wilderness, by a pillar of cloud and fire. *Even by springs of water*, which will be ready to them in their march, shall he guide them. God will furnish them with suitable and seasonable comforts, not like the pools of rain-water in the valley of Baca, but like the water out of the rock which followed Israel. Those who are under a divine guidance, and follow that closely, while they do so, may, upon good grounds, hope for divine comforts and cordials. The world leads its followers by broken cisterns, or brooks that fail in summer; but God leads those that are his by springs of water. And those whom God guides shall find a ready road and all obstacles removed (v. 11): *I will make all my mountains a way*. He that in times past made the sea a way, now with as much ease will make the mountains a way, though they seemed impassable. The highway, or causeway, shall be raised, to make it both the plainer and the fairer. Note, The ways in which God leads his people he himself will be the overseer of, and will take care that they be well mended and kept in repair, as of old the ways that led to the cities of refuge. The levelling of the roads from Babylon, as it was foretold (ch. xl. 2, 3), was applied to gospel work, and so may this be. Though there be difficulties in the way to heaven, which we cannot by our own strength get over, yet the grace of God shall be sufficient to help us over them and to make even the mountains a way, ch. xxxv. 8.

(5.) He shall bring them all together from all parts, that they may return in a body, that they may encourage one another and be the more taken notice of. They were dispersed into several parts of the country of Babylon, as their enemies pleased, to prevent any combination among themselves. But, when God's time shall come to bring them home together, one spirit shall animate them all, all that lie at the greatest distance from each other, and those also that had taken shelter in other countries shall meet them in the land of Judah, v. 12. Here shall a party come from far, some from the north, some from the west, some from the land of Sinim,

which probably is some province of Babylon not elsewhere named in scripture, but some make it to be a country belonging to one of the chief cities of Egypt, called *Sin*; of which we read, Ezek. xxx. 15, 16. Now this promise was to have a further accomplishment in the great confluence of converts to the gospel church, and its full accomplishment when God's chosen shall come from the east and from the west to sit down with the patriarchs in the kingdom of God, Matt. viii. 11.

13 Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the LORD hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted. 14 But Zion said, The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. 15 Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. 16 Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me. 17 Thy children shall make haste; thy destroyers and they that made thee waste shall go forth of thee.

The scope of these verses is to show that the return of the people of God out of their captivity, and the eternal redemption to be wrought out by Christ (of which that was a type), would be great occasions of joy to the church and great proofs of the tender care God has of the church.

I. Nothing can furnish us with better matter for songs of praise and thanksgiving, v. 13. Let the whole creation join with us in songs of joy, for it shares with us in the benefits of the redemption, and all they can contribute to this sacred melody is little enough in return for such inestimable favours, Ps. xcvi. 11. Let there be joy in heaven, and let the angels of God celebrate the praises of the great Redeemer; let the earth and the mountains, particularly the great ones of the earth, be joyful, and break forth into singing, for the earnest expectation of the creature that waits for the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom. viii. 19, 21) shall now be abundantly answered. God's people are the blessings and ornaments of the world, and therefore let there be universal joy, for God has comforted his people that were in sorrow and he will have mercy upon the afflicted because of his compassion, upon his afflicted because of his covenant.

II. Nothing can furnish us with more convincing arguments to prove the most tender and affectionate concern God has for his church, and her interests and comforts.

1. The troubles of the church have given some occasion to question God's care and



concern for it, *v. 14. Zion, in distress, said, The Lord has forsaken me, and looks after me no more; my Lord has forgotten me, and will look after me no more.* See how deplorable the case of God's people may be sometimes, such that they may seem to be forsaken and forgotten of their God; and at such a time their temptations may be alarmingly violent. Infidels, in their presumption, say *God has forsaken the earth* (Ezek. viii. 12), and has *forgotten their sins*, Ps. x. 11. Weak believers, in their despondency, are ready to say, "God has forsaken his church and forgotten the sorrows of his people." But we have no more reason to question his promise and grace than we have to question his providence and justice. He is as sure a rewarder as he is a revenger. Away therefore with these distrusts and jealousies, which are the bane of friendship.

2. The triumphs of the church, after her troubles, will in due time put the matter out of question.

(1.) What God will do for Zion we are told, *v. 17. [1.] Her friends, who had deserted her, shall be gathered to her, and shall contribute their utmost to her assistance and comfort: Thy children shall make haste.* Converts to the faith of Christ are the children of the church; they shall join themselves to her with great readiness and cheerfulness, and flock into the communion of saints, as doves to their windows. "*Thy builders shall make haste*" (so some read it), "who shall build up thy houses, thy walls, especially thy temple; they shall do it with expedition." Church work is usually slow work; but, when God's time shall come, it shall be done suddenly. [2.] Her enemies, who had threatened and assaulted her, shall be forced to withdraw from her: *Thy destroyers, and those who made thee waste, who had made themselves masters of the country and ravaged it, shall go forth of thee.* By Christ the prince of this world, the great destroyer, is cast out, is dispossessed, has his power broken and his attempts quite baffled.

(2.) Now by this it will appear that Zion's suggestions were altogether groundless, that God has not forsaken her, nor forgotten her, nor ever will. Be assured, [1.] That God has a tender affection for his church and people, *v. 15.* In answer to Zion's fears, God speaks as one concerned for his own glory (he takes himself to be reflected upon if Zion say, *The Lord has forsaken me, and he will clear himself*), as one concerned also for his people's comfort; he would not have them droop, and be discouraged, and give way to any uneasy thoughts. "You think that I have forgotten you. *Can a woman forget her sucking child?*" First, It is not likely that she should. A woman, whose honour it is to be of the tender sex as well as the fair one, cannot but have compassion for a child, which, being both harmless and helpless, is a proper object of compassion.

A mother, especially, cannot but be concerned for her own child; for it is her own, a piece of herself, and very lately one with her. A nursing mother, most of all, cannot but be tender of her sucking child; her own breasts will soon put her in mind of it if she should forget it. But, *Secondly*, It is possible that she may forget. A woman may perhaps be so unhappy as not to be able to remember her sucking child (she may be sick, and dying, and going to the land of forgetfulness), or she may be so unnatural as not to have compassion on the son of her womb, as those who, to conceal their shame, are the death of their children as soon as they are their life, Lam. iv. 10; Dent. xxviii. 57. But, says God, *I will not forget thee.* Note, God's compassions to his people infinitely exceed those of the tenderest parents towards their children. What are the affections of nature to those of the God of nature! [2.] That he has a constant care of his church and people (*v. 16*): *I have engraven thee upon the palms of my hands.* This does not allude to the foolish art of palmistry, which imagines every man's fate to be engraved in the palms of his hands and to be legible in the lines there, but to the custom of those who tie a string upon their hands or fingers to put them in mind of things which they are afraid they shall forget, or to the wearing of signet or locket-rings in remembrance of some dear friend. His setting them thus as a seal upon his arm denotes his setting them as a seal upon his heart, and his being ever mindful of them and their interests, Cant. viii. 6. If we bind God's law as a sign upon our hand (Deut. vi. 8, 11, 18), he will engrave our interests as a sign on his hand, and will look upon that and remember the covenant. He adds, "*Thy walls shall be continually before me*; thy ruined walls, though no pleasing spectacle, shall be in my thoughts of compassion." Do Zion's friends favour her dust? Ps. cii. 14. So does her God. Or, "The plan and model of thy walls, that are to be rebuilt, is before me, and they shall certainly be built according to it." Or, "Thy walls (that is, thy safety) are my continual care; so are the watchmen on thy walls." Some apply his engraving his church on the palms of his hands to the wounds in Christ's hands when he was crucified; he will look on the marks of them, and remember those for whom he suffered and died.

18 Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to thee. As I live, saith the LORD, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth. 19 For thy waste and thy desolate places, and the land of thy destruction, shall even

now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants, and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away. 20 The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell. 21 Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where *had they been?* 22 Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in *their* arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon *their* shoulders. 23 And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with *their* face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I *am* the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.

Two things are here promised, which were to be in part accomplished in the reviving of the Jewish church after its return out of captivity, but more fully in the planting of the Christian church by the preaching of the gospel of Christ; and we may take the comfort of these promises.

I. That the church shall be replenished with great numbers added to it. It was promised (v. 17) that *her children should make haste*; that promise is here enlarged upon, and is made very encouraging. It is promised,

1. That multitudes shall flock to the church from all parts. *Look round, and see how they gather themselves to thee* (v. 18), by a local accession to the Jewish church. They come to Jerusalem from all the adjacent countries, for that was then the centre of their unity; but, under the gospel, it is by a spiritual accession to the mystical body of Christ in faith and love. Those that come to Jesus as the Mediator of the new covenant do thereby come to the Mount Zion, the church of the first-born, Heb. xii. 22, 23. *Lift up thy eyes, and behold how the fields are white unto the harvest*, John iv. 35. Note, It is matter of joy to the church to see a multitude of converts to Christ.

2. That such as are added to the church shall not be a burden and blemish to her, but her strength and ornament. This part

of the promise is confirmed with an oath: *As I live, saith the Lord, thou shalt surely clothe thyself with them all*. The addition of such numbers to the church shall complete her clothing; and, when all that were chosen are effectually called, then the bride, the Lamb's wife, shall have made herself ready, shall be quite dressed, Rev. xix. 7. They shall make her to appear comely and considerable; and she shall therefore bind them on with as much care and complacency as a bride does her ornaments. When those that are added to the church are serious, and holy, and exemplary in their conversation, they are an ornament to it.

3. That thus the country which was waste and desolate, and *without inhabitant* (ch. v. 9; vi. 11), shall be again peopled, nay, it shall be over-peopled (v. 19): "*Thy waste and thy desolate places, that have long lain so, and the land of thy destruction, that land of thine which was destroyed with thee and which nobody cared for dwelling in, shall now be so full of people that there shall be no room for the inhabitants.*" Here is a blessing poured out till there be not room enough to receive it, Mal. iii. 10. Not that they shall be crowded by their enemies, or straitened for room, as Abraham and Lot were, because of the Canaanite in the land. "*No, those that swallow thee up, and took possession of thy land when thy possession of it was discontinued, shall be far away.*" Thy people shall be numerous, and there shall be no stranger, no enemy, among them." Thus the kingdom of God among men, which had been impoverished and almost depopulated, partly by the corruptions of the Jewish church and partly by the abominations of the Gentile world, was again peopled and enriched by the setting up of the Christian church, and by its graces and glories.

4. That the new converts shall strangely increase and multiply. Jerusalem, after she has lost abundance of her children by the sword, famine, and captivity, shall have a new family growing up instead of them, children which she *shall have after she has lost the other* (v. 20), as Seth, who was appointed another seed instead of Abel, and Job's children, which God blessed him with instead of those that were killed in the ruins of the house. God will repair his church's losses and secure to himself a seed to serve him in it. It is promised to the Jews, after their return, that *Jerusalem shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets*, Zech. viii. 5. The church, after it has lost the Jews, who will be cut off by their own infidelity, shall have abundance of children still, more than she had when the Jews belonged to her. See Gal. iv. 27. They shall be so numerous that, (1.) The children shall complain for want of room; they shall say (and it is a good hearing), "Our numbers increase so fast that the place is too



*strait for us;*” as the sons of the prophets complained, 2 Kings vi. 1. But, strait as the place is, still more shall desire to be admitted, and the church shall gladly admit them, and the inconvenient straitness of the place shall be no hindrance to either; for it will be found, whatever we think, that even when the *poor and the maimed, the halt and the blind*, are brought in, yet still there is room, room enough for those that are in and room for more, Luke xiv. 21, 22. (2.) The mother shall stand amazed at the increase of her family, v. 21. She shall say, *Who has begotten me these?* and, *Who has brought up these?* They come to her with all the duty, affection, and submission of children; and yet she never bore any pain for them, nor took any pains with them, but has them ready reared to her hand. This gives her a pleasing surprise, and she cannot but be astonished at it, considering what her condition had been very lately and very long. The Jewish nation had left her children; they were cut off. She had been desolate, without ark, and altar, and temple-service, those tokens of God’s espousals to them; nay, she had been a captive, and continually removing to and fro, in an unsettled condition, and not likely to bring up children either for God or herself. She was left alone in obscurity (*this is Zion whom no man seeks after*), left in all the solitude and sorrow of a widowed state. How then came she to be thus replenished? See here, [1.] That the church is not perpetually visible, but there are times when it is desolate, and left alone, and made few in number. [2.] That yet on the other hand its desolations shall not be perpetual, nor will it be found too hard for God to repair them, and out of stones to raise up children unto Abraham. [3.] That sometimes this is done in a very surprising way, as when a nation is born at once, *ch. lxvi. 8.*

5. That this shall be done with the help of the Gentiles, v. 22. The Jews were cast off, among whom it was expected that the church should be built up; but God will *sow it to himself in the earth*, and will thence reap a plentiful crop, Hos. ii. 23. Observe, (1.) How the Gentiles shall be called in. God will *lift up his hand to them*, to invite or beckon them, having all the day stretched it out in vain to the Jews, *ch. lxxv. 2.* Or it denotes the exerting of an almighty power, that of his Spirit and grace, to compel them to come in, to make them willing. And he will *set up his standard to them*, the preaching of the everlasting gospel, to which they shall gather, and under which they shall enlist themselves. (2.) How they shall come: *They shall bring thy sons in their arms.* They shall assist the sons of Zion, which are found among them, in their return to their own country, and shall forward them with as much tenderness as ever

any parent carried a child that was weak and helpless. God can raise up friends for returning Israelites even among Gentiles. *The earth helped the woman*, Rev. xii. 16. Or, “When they come themselves, they shall bring their children, and make them thy children;” compare *ch. lx. 4.* “Dost thou ask, *Who has begotten and brought up these?* Know that they were begotten and brought up among the Gentiles, but they are now brought into thy family.” Let all that are concerned about young converts, and young beginners in religion, learn hence to deal very tenderly and carefully with them, as Christ does with the lambs which he *gathers with his arms and carries in his bosom.*

II. That the church shall have a great and prevailing interest in the nations, v. 22, 23. 1. Some of the princes of the nations shall become patrons and protectors to the church: *Kings shall be thy nursing fathers*, to carry thy sons in their arms (as Moses, Num. xi. 12); and, because women are the most proper nurses, *their queens shall be thy nursing mothers.* This promise was in part fulfilled to the Jews, after their return out of captivity. Several of the kings of Persia were very tender of their interests, countenanced and encouraged them, as Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes; Esther the queen was a nursing mother to the Jews that remained in their captivity, putting her life in her hand to snatch the child out of the flames. The Christian church, after a long captivity, was happy in some such kings and queens as Constantine and his mother Helena, and afterwards Theodosius, and others, who nursed the church with all possible care and tenderness. Whenever the sceptre of government is put into the hands of religious princes, then this promise is fulfilled. The church in this world is in an infant state, and it is in the power of princes and magistrates to do it a great deal of service; it is happy when they do so, when their power is a praise to those that do well. 2. Others of them, who stand it out against the church’s interests, will be forced to yield and to repent of their opposition: *They shall bow down to thee and lick the dust.* The promise to the church of Philadelphia seems to be borrowed from this (Rev. iii. 9): *I will make those of the synagogue of Satan to come and worship before thy feet.* Or it may be meant of the willing subjection which kings and kingdoms shall pay to Christ the church’s King, as he manifests himself in the church (Ps. lxxii. 11): *All kings shall fall down before him.* And by all this it shall be made to appear, (1.) That God is the Lord, the sovereign Lord of all, against whom there is no standing out nor rising up. (2.) That those who wait for him, in a dependence upon his promise and a resignation to his will, shall not be made ashamed of their hope; for the vision of peace

is for an appointed time, and at the end it shall speak and shall not lie.

24 Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered? 25 But thus saith the LORD, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children. 26 And I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh; and they shall be drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine: and all flesh shall know that I the LORD am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

Here is, I. An objection started against the promise of the Jews' release out of their captivity in Babylon, suggesting that it was a thing not to be expected; for (v. 24) they were a prey in the hand of the mighty, of such as were then the greatest potentates on earth, and therefore it was not likely they should be rescued by force. Yet that was not all: they were lawful captives; by the law of God, having offended, they were justly delivered into captivity; and by the law of nations, being taken in war, they were justly detained in captivity till they should be ransomed or exchanged. Now this is spoken either, 1. By the enemies, as justifying themselves in their refusal to let them go. They plead both might and right. Proud men think all their own that they can lay their hands on and their title good if they have but the longest sword. Or, 2. By their friends, either in a way of distrust, despairing of the deliverance ("for who is able to deal with those that detain us, either by force of arms or a treaty of peace?"), or in a way of thankfulness, admiring the deliverance. "Who would have thought that ever the prey should be taken from the mighty? Yet it is done." This is applicable to our redemption by Christ. As to Satan, we were a prey in the hand of the mighty, and yet delivered even from him that had the power of death, by him that had the power of life. As to the justice of God, we were lawful captives, and yet delivered by a price of inestimable value.

II. This objection answered by an express promise, and a further promise; for God's promises being all yea, and amen, they may well serve to corroborate one another. 1. Here is an express promise with a *non-obstante*—notwithstanding to the strength of the enemy (v. 25): "*Even the captives of the mighty, though they are mighty, shall be taken away, and it is to no purpose for them to oppose it; and the prey of the terrible, though they are terrible, shall be delivered;*

and, as they cannot with all their strength outforce, so they cannot with all their impudence outface, the deliverance, and the counsels of God concerning it." *The Lord saith thus*, who, having all power and all hearts in his hands is able to make his words good. 2. Here is a further promise, showing how, and in what way, God will bring about the deliverance. He will bring judgments upon the oppressors, and so will work salvation for the oppressed: "*I will contend with him that contends with thee, will plead thy cause against those that justify themselves in oppressing thee; whoever it be, though but a single person, that contends with thee, he shall know that it is at his peril, and thus I will save thy children.*" The captives shall be delivered by *leading captive captive*, that is, sending those into captivity that had held God's people captive, Rev. xiii. 10. Nay, they shall have blood for blood (v. 26): "*I will feed those that oppress thee with their own flesh, and they shall be drunken with their own blood.*" The proud Babylonians shall become not only an easy, but an acceptable, prey to one another. God will send a dividing spirit among them, and their ruin, which was begun by a foreign invasion, shall be completed by their intestine divisions. They shall *bite, and devour one another*, till they are *consumed one of another*. They shall greedily and with delight prey upon those that are their own flesh and blood." God can make the oppressors of his church to be their own tormentors and their own destroyers. The New-Testament Babylon, having made herself drunk with the blood of the saints, shall have *blood given her to drink, for she is worthy*. See how cruel men sometimes are to themselves and to one another; indeed those who are so to others are so to themselves, for God's justice and men's revenge will mete to them what they have measured to others. They not only thirst after blood, but drink it so greedily that they are drunken with it, and with as much pleasure as if it were sweet wine. If God had not more mercy on sinners than they would have one upon another were their passions let loose, the world would be soon an *Aceldama*, nay, a desolation.

III. See what will be the effect of Babylon's ruin: *All flesh shall know that I the Lord am thy Saviour*. God will make it to appear, to the conviction of all the world, that, though Israel seem lost and cast off, they have a Redeemer, and, though they are made a prey to the mighty, Jacob has a mighty One, who is able to deal with all his enemies. God intends, by the deliverances of his church, both to notify and to magnify his own name.

#### CHAP. L.

In this chapter, I. Those to whom God sends are justly charged with bringing all the troubles they were in upon themselves, by their own wilfulness and obstinacy, it being made to appear that God was able and ready to help them if they had been fit for deliverance.



ance, ver. 1-3. II. He by whom God sends produces his commission (ver. 4), alleges his own readiness to submit to all the services and sufferings he was called to in the execution of it (ver. 5, 6), and assures himself that God, who sent him, would stand by him and bear him out against all opposition, ver. 7-9. III. The message that is sent is life and death, good and evil, the blessing and the curse, comfort to desponding saints and terror to presuming sinners, ver. 10, 11. Now all this seems to have a double reference, 1. To the unbelieving Jews in Babylon, who quarrelled with God for his dealings with them, and to the prophet Isaiah, who, though dead long before the captivity, yet, prophesying so plainly and fully of it, saw fit to produce his credentials, to justify what he had said. 2. To the unbelieving Jews in our Saviour's time, whose own fault it was that they were rejected, Christ having preached much to them, and suffered much from them, and being herein borne up by a divine power. The "contents" of this chapter, in our Bibles, give this sense of it, very concisely, thus:—"Christ shows that the dereliction of the Jews is not to be imputed to him, by his ability to save, by his obedience in that work, and by his confidence in divine assistance." The prophet concludes with an exhortation to trust in God and not in ourselves.

**T**HUS saith the Lord, Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away. 2 Wherefore, when I came, was there none to answer? When I called, was there none to answer? Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver? Behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness: their fish stinketh, because there is no water, and dieth for thirst. 3 I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering.

Those who have professed to be the people of God, and yet seem to be dealt severely with, are apt to complain of God, and to lay the fault upon him, as if he had been hard with them. But, in answer to their murmurings, we have here,

I. A challenge given them to prove, or produce any evidence, that the quarrel began on God's side, v. 1. They could not say that he had done them any wrong or had acted arbitrarily. 1. He had been a husband to them; and husbands were then allowed a power to put away their wives upon any little disgust: if their wives found not favour in their eyes, they made nothing of giving them a bill of divorce, Deut. xxiv. 1; Matt. xix. 7. But they could not say that God had dealt so with them. It is true they were now separated from him, and had abode many days without ephod, altar, or sacrifice; but whose fault was that? They could not say that God had given their mother a bill of divorce; let them produce it if they can, for a bill of divorce was given into the hand of her that was divorced. 2. He had been a father to them; and fathers had then a power to sell their children for slaves to their creditors, in satisfaction for the debts they were not otherwise able to pay. Now it is true the Jews were sold to the Baby-

lonians then, and afterwards to the Romans; but did God sell them for payment of his debts? No, he was not indebted to any of those to whom they were sold, or, if he had sold them, he did not increase his wealth by their price, Ps. xlv. 12. When God chastens his children, it is neither for his pleasure (Heb. xii. 10) nor for his profit. All that are saved are saved by a prerogative of grace, but those that perish are cut off by an act of divine holiness and justice, not of absolute sovereignty.

II. A charge exhibited against them, showing them that they were themselves the authors of their own ruin: "*Behold, for your iniquities, for the pleasure of them and the gratification of your own base lusts, you have sold yourselves, for your iniquities you are sold*; not as children are sold by their parents, to pay their debts, but as malefactors are sold by the judges, to punish them for their crimes. You sold yourselves to work wickedness, and therefore God justly sold you into the hands of your enemies, 2 Chron. xii. 5, 8. It is for your transgressions that your mother is put away, for her whoredoms and adulteries," which were always allowed to be a just cause of divorce. The Jews were sent into Babylon for their idolatry, a sin which broke the marriage covenant, and were at last rejected for crucifying the Lord of glory; these were the iniquities for which they were sold and put away.

III. The confirmation of this challenge and this charge. 1. It is plain that it was owing to themselves that they were cast off; for God came and offered them his favour, offered them his helping hand, either to prevent their trouble or to deliver them out of it, but they slighted him and all the tenders of his grace. "Do you lay it upon me?" (says God); "tell me, then, wherefore, when I came, was there no man to meet me, when I called, was there none to answer me?" v. 2. God came to them by his servants the prophets, demanding the fruits of his vineyard (Matt. xxi. 34); he sent them his messengers, rising up betimes and sending them (Jer. xxxv. 15); he called to them to leave their sins, and so prevent their own ruin: but *was there no man, or next to none, that had any regard to the warnings which the prophets gave them, none that answered the calls of God, or complied with the messages he sent them; and this was it for which they were sold and put away. Because they mocked the messengers of the Lord, therefore God brought upon them the king of the Chaldeans*, 2 Chron. xxxvi. 16, 17. Last of all he sent unto them his Son. He came to his own, but his own received him not; he called them to himself, but there were none that answered; he would have gathered Jerusalem's children together, but they would not; they knew not, because they would not know, the things that belonged to their

peace, nor the day of their visitation, and for that transgression it was that they were put away and their house was left desolate, Matt. xxi. 41; xxiii. 37, 38; Luke xix. 41, 42. When God calls men to happiness, and they will not answer, they are justly left to be miserable. 2. It is plain that it was not owing to a want of power in God, for he is almighty, and could have recovered them from so great a death; nor was it owing to a want of power in Christ, for he is *able to save to the uttermost*. The unbelieving Jews in Babylon thought they were not delivered because their God was not able to deliver them; and those in Christ's time were ready to ask, in scorn, *Can this man save us? For himself he cannot save*. "But" (says God) "*is my hand shortened at all, or is it weakened?*" Can any limits be set to Omnipotence? Cannot he redeem who is the great Redeemer? Has he no *power to deliver* whose all power is? To put to silence, and for ever to put to shame, their doubts concerning his power, he here gives unquestionable proofs of it. (1.) He can, when he pleases, *dry up the seas*, and make the rivers a wilderness. He did so for Israel when he redeemed them out of Egypt, and he can do so again for their redemption out of Babylon. It is done at his *rebuke*, as easily as with a word's speaking. He can so dry up the rivers as to leave the fish to die for want of water, and to putrefy. When God *turned the waters of Egypt into blood he slew the fish*, Ps. cv. 29. The expression our Saviour sometimes used concerning the power of faith, that it will *remove mountains and plant sycamores in the sea*, is not unlike this; if their faith could do that, no doubt their faith would save them, and therefore they were inexcusable if they perished in unbelief. (2.) He can, when he pleases, eclipse the lights of heaven, *clothe them with blackness, and make sackcloth their covering* (v. 3) by thick and dark clouds interposing, which he balances, Job xxxvi. 32; xxxvii. 16.

4 The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to *him that is weary*: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned. 5 The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. 6 I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. 7 For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know

that I shall not be ashamed. 8 *He is* near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? Let us stand together: who *is* mine adversary? Let him come near to me. 9 Behold the Lord God will help me; who *is* he *that* shall condemn me? Lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up.

Our Lord Jesus, having proved himself able to save, here shows himself as willing as he is able. We suppose the prophet Isaiah to say something of himself in these verses, engaging and encouraging himself to go on in his work as a prophet, notwithstanding the many hardships he met with, not doubting but that God would stand by him and strengthen him; but, like David, he speaks of himself as a type of Christ, who is here prophesied of and promised to be the Saviour.

1. As an acceptable preacher. Isaiah, as a prophet, was qualified for the work to which he was called, so were the rest of God's prophets, and others whom he employed as his messengers; but Christ was anointed with the Spirit above his fellows. To make the man of God perfect, he has, 1. *The tongue of the learned*, to know how to give instruction, *how to speak a word in season to him that is weary*, v. 4. God, who made man's mouth, gave Moses the tongue of the learned, to speak for the terror and conviction of Pharaoh, Exod. iv. 11, 12. He gave to Christ the tongue of the learned, to speak a word in season for the comfort of those that are weary and heavily laden under the burden of sin, Matt. xi. 28. *Grace was poured into his lips*, and they are said to *drop sweet-smelling myrrh*. See what is the best learning of a minister, to know how to comfort troubled consciences, and to speak pertinently, properly, and plainly, to the various cases of poor souls. An ability to do this is God's gift, and it is one of the best gifts, which we should covet earnestly. Let us repose ourselves in the many comfortable words which Christ has spoken to the weary. 2. The ear of the learned, to receive instruction. Prophets have as much need of this as of the tongue of the learned; for they must deliver what they are taught and no other, must hear the word from God's mouth diligently and attentively, that they may speak it exactly, Ezek. iii. 17. Christ himself received that he might give. None must undertake to be teachers who have not first been learners. Christ's apostles were first disciples, *scribes instructed unto the kingdom of heaven*, Matt. xiii. 52. Nor is it enough to hear, but we must *hear as the learned*, hear and understand, hear and remember, hear as those that would learn by what we hear. Those that would hear as the learned must be awake, and



wakeful; for we are naturally drowsy and sleepy, and unapt to hear at all, or we hear by the halves, hear and do not heed. Our ears need to be wakened; we need to have something said to rouse us, to awaken us out of our spiritual slumbers, that we may hear as for our lives. We need to be awakened *morning by morning*, as duly as the day returns, to be awakened to do the work of the day in its day. Our case calls for continual fresh supplies of divine grace, to free us from the dulness we contract daily. The morning, when our spirits are most lively, is a proper time for communion with God; then we are in the best frame both to speak to him (*my voice shalt thou hear in the morning*) and to hear from him. The people came *early in the morning* to hear Christ in the temple (Luke xxi. 38), for, it seems, his were morning lectures. And it is God that wakens us morning by morning. If we do any thing to purpose in his service, it is he who, as our Master, calls us up; and we should doze perpetually if he did not waken us morning by morning.

II. As a patient sufferer, v. 5, 6. One would think that he who was commissioned and qualified to speak comfort to the weary should meet with no difficulty in his work, but universal acceptance. It is however quite otherwise; he has both hard work to do and hard usage to undergo; and here he tells us with what undaunted constancy he went through with it. We have no reason to question but that the prophet Isaiah went on resolutely in the work to which God had called him, though we read not of his undergoing any such hardships as are here supposed; but we are sure that the prediction was abundantly verified in Jesus Christ: and here we have, 1. His patient obedience in his doing work. "The Lord God has not only wakened my ear to hear what he says, but has opened my ear to receive it, and comply with it" (Ps. xl. 6, 7, *My ear hast thou opened; then said I, Lo, I come*); for when he adds, *I was not rebellious, neither turned away back*, more is implied than expressed—that he was willing, that though he foresaw a great deal of difficulty and discouragement, though he was to take pains and give constant attendance as a servant, though he was to empty himself of that which was very great and humble himself to that which was very mean, yet he did not fly off, did not fail, nor was discouraged. He continued very free and forward to his work even when he came to the hardest part of it. Note, As a good understanding in the truths of God, so a good will to the work and service of God, is from the grace of God. 2. His obedient patience in his suffering work. I call it obedient patience because he was patient with an eye to his Father's will, thus pleading with himself, *This commandment have I received of my Father*, and thus submitting to God,

*Not as I will, but as thou wilt.* In this submission he resigned himself, (1.) To be scourged: *I gave my back to the smiters*; and that not only by submitting to the indignity when he was smitten, but by permitting it (or admitting it rather) among the other instances of pain and shame which he would voluntarily undergo for us. (2.) To be buffeted: *I gave my cheeks to those that not only smote them, but plucked off the hair of the beard*, which was a greater degree both of pain and of ignominy. (3.) To be spit upon: *I hid not my face from shame and spitting*. He could have hidden his face from it, could have avoided it, but he would not, because he was made a reproach of men, and thus he would answer to the type of Job, that man of sorrows, of whom it is said that they *smote him on the cheek reproachfully* (Job xvi. 10) and *spared not to spit in his face* (Job xxx. 10), which was an expression not only of contempt, but of abhorrence and indignation. All this Christ underwent for us, and voluntarily, to convince us of his willingness to save us.

III. As a courageous champion, v. 7—9. The Redeemer is as famous for his boldness as for his humility and patience, and, though he yields, yet he is more than a conqueror. Observe, 1. The dependence he has upon God. What was the prophet Isaiah's support was the support of Christ himself (v. 7): *The Lord God will help me*; and again, v. 9. Those whom God employs he will assist, and will take care they want not any help that they or their work call for. God, having laid help upon his Son for us, gave help to him, and his hand was all along *with the man of his right hand*. Nor will he only assist him in his work, but accept of him (v. 8): *He is near that justifieth me*. Isaiah, no doubt, was falsely accused and loaded with reproach and calumny, as other prophets were; but he despised the reproach, knowing that God would roll it away and bring forth his righteousness as the light, perhaps in this world (Ps. xxxvii. 6), at furthest in the great day, when there will be a resurrection of names as well as bodies, and the righteous shall shine forth as the morning sun. And so it was verified in Christ; by his resurrection he was proved to be not the man that he was represented, not a blasphemer, not a deceiver, not an enemy to Cæsar. The judge that condemned him owned he found no fault in him; the centurion, or sheriff, that had charge of his execution, declared him a righteous man: so near was he that justified him. But it was true of him in a further and more peculiar sense: the Father justified him when he accepted the satisfaction he made for the sin of man, and constituted him *the Lord our righteousness*, who was made sin for us. He was *justified in the Spirit*, 1 Tim. iii. 16. He was near who did it; for his resurrection, by which he was justified, soon followed

his condemnation and crucifixion. He was straightway glorified, John xiii. 32. 2. The confidence he thereupon has of success in his undertaking: "If God will help me, if he will justify me, will stand by me and bear me out, *I shall not be confounded*, as those are that come short of the end they aimed at and the satisfaction they promised themselves: *I know that I shall not be ashamed.*" Though his enemies did all they could to put him to shame, yet he kept his ground, he kept his countenance, and was not ashamed of the work he had undertaken. Note, Work for God is work that we should not be ashamed of; and hope in God is hope that we shall not be ashamed of. Those that trust in God for help shall not be disappointed; they know whom they have trusted, and therefore know they shall not be ashamed. 3. The defiance which in this confidence he bids to all opposers and opposition: God will help me, and *therefore have I set my face like a flint.*" The prophet did so; he was bold in reproofing sin, in warning sinners (Ezek. iii. 8, 9), and in asserting the truth of his predictions. Christ did so; he went on in his work, as Mediator, with unshaken constancy and undaunted resolution; he did not fail nor was discouraged; and here he challenges all his opposers, (1.) To enter the lists with him: *Who will contend with me*, either in law or by the sword? *Let us stand together* as combatants, or as the plaintiff and defendant. *Who is my adversary?* Who is the master of my cause? so the word is. "Who will pretend to enter an action against me? Let him appear, and come near to me, for I will not abscond." Many offered to dispute with Christ, but he put them to silence. The prophet speaks this in the name of all faithful ministers; those who keep close to the pure word of God, in delivering their message, need not fear contradiction; the scriptures will bear them out, whoever contends with them. *Great is the truth and will prevail.* Christ speaks this in the name of all believers, speaks it as their champion. Who dares be an enemy to those whom he is a friend to, or contend with those for whom he is an advocate? Thus St. Paul applies it (Rom. viii. 33): *Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?* (2.) He challenges them to prove any crime upon him (v. 9): *Who is he that shall condemn me?* The prophet perhaps was condemned to die; Christ we are sure was; and yet both could say, *Who is he that shall condemn?* For there is no condemnation to those whom God justifies. There were those that did condemn them, but what became of them? *They all shall wax old as a garment.* The righteous cause of Christ and his prophets shall outlive all opposition. The moth shall eat them up silently and insensibly; a little thing will serve to destroy them. But the roaring lion himself shall not prevail

against God's witnesses. All believers are enabled to make this challenge, *Who is he that shall condemn? It is Christ that died.*

10 Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God. 11 Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow.

The prophet, having the tongue of the learned given him, that he might give to every one his portion, here makes use of it, rightly dividing the word of truth. It is the summary of the gospel. *He that believes shall be saved* (he that trusts in the name of the Lord shall be comforted, though for a while he walk in darkness and have no light), but *he that believes not shall be damned*; though for a while he walk in the light of his own fire, yet he shall lie down in sorrow.

I. Comfort is here spoken to disconsolate saints, and they are encouraged to trust in God's grace, v. 10. Here observe, 1. What is always the character of a child of God. He is one that fears the Lord with a filial fear, that stands in awe of his majesty and is afraid of incurring his displeasure. This is a grace that usually appears most in good people when they walk in darkness, when other graces appear not. They then tremble at his word (ch. lxvi. 2) and are afraid of his judgments, Ps. cxix. 120. He is one that obeys the voice of God's servant, is willing to be ruled by the Lord Jesus, as God's servant in the great work of man's redemption, one that yields a sincere obedience to the law of Christ and cheerfully comes up to the terms of his covenant. Those that truly fear God will obey the voice of Christ. 2. What is sometimes the case of a child of God. It is supposed that though he has in his heart the fear of God, and faith in Christ, yet for a time he walks in darkness and has no light, is disquieted and has little or no comfort. Who is there that does so? This intimates that it is a case which sometimes happens among the professors of religion, yet not very often; but, whenever it happens, God takes notice of it. It is no new thing for the children and heirs of light sometimes to walk in darkness, and for a time not to have any glimpse or gleam of light. This is not meant so much of the comforts of this life (those that fear God, when they have ever so great an abundance of them, do not walk in them as their light) as of their spiritual comforts, which relate to their souls. They walk in darkness when their evidences



for heaven are clouded, their joy in God is interrupted, the testimony of the Spirit is suspended, and the light of God's countenance is eclipsed. Pensive Christians are apt to be melancholy, and those who fear always are apt to fear too much. 3. What is likely to be an effectual cure in this sad case. He that is thus in the dark, (1.) *Let him trust in the name of the Lord*, in the goodness of his nature, and that which he has made known of himself, his wisdom, power, and goodness. *The name of the Lord is a strong tower*, let him run into that. Let him depend upon it that if he walk before God, which a man may do though he walk in the dark, he shall find God all-sufficient to him. (2.) Let him *stay himself upon his God*, his in covenant; let him keep hold of his covenant-relation to God, and call God *his God*, as Christ on the cross, *My God, My God*. Let him stay himself upon the promises of the covenant, and build his hopes on them. When a child of God is ready to sink he will find enough in God to stay himself upon. Let him trust in Christ, for *God's name is in him* (Exod. xxiii. 21), trust in that name of his, *The Lord our righteousness*, and stay himself upon God as his God, in and through a Mediator.

II. Conviction is here spoken to presuming sinners, and they are warned not to trust in themselves, *v. 11*. Observe, 1. The description given of them. They *kindle a fire*, and *walk in the light of that fire*. They depend upon their own righteousness, offer all their sacrifices, and burn all their incense, with that fire (as Nadab and Abihu) and not with the fire from heaven. In their hope of acceptance with God they have no regard to the righteousness of Christ. They refresh and please themselves with a conceit of their own merit and sufficiency, and warm themselves with that. It is both light and heat to them. They *compass themselves about with sparks of their own kindling*. As they trust in their own righteousness, and not in the righteousness of Christ, so they place their happiness in their worldly possessions and enjoyments, and not in the favour of God. Creature-comforts are as sparks, short-lived and soon gone; yet the children of this world, while they last, warm themselves by them, and walk with pride and pleasure in the light of them. 2. The doom passed upon them. They are ironically told to *walk in the light of their own fire*. "Make your best of it, while it lasts. But what will be in the end thereof, what will it come to at last? This shall you have of my hand (says Christ, for to him the judgment is committed), *you shall lie down in sorrow*, shall go to bed in the dark." See Job xviii. 5, 6. *His candle shall be put out with him*. Those that make the world their comfort, and their own righteousness their confidence, will certainly meet with a fatal disappointment, which will be bitterness in the end. A

godly man's way may be melancholy, but his end shall be peace and everlasting light. A wicked man's way may be pleasant, but his end and endless abode will be utter darkness

## CHAP. LI.

This chapter is designed for the comfort and encouragement of those that fear God and keep his commandments, even when they walk in darkness and have no light. Whether it was intended primarily for the support of the captive in Babylon is not certain, probably it was; but comforts thus generally expressed ought not to be so confined. Whenever the church of God is in distress her friends and well-wishers may comfort themselves and one another with these words, I. That God, who raised his church at first out of nothing, will take care that it shall not perish, *ver. 1-3*. II. That the righteousness and salvation he designs for his church are sure and near, very near and very sure, *ver. 4-6*. III. That the persecutors of the church are weak and dying creatures, *ver. 7, 8*. IV. That the same power which did wonders for the church formerly is now engaged and employed for her protection and deliverance, *ver. 9-11*. V. That God himself, the Maker of the world, had undertaken both to deliver his people out of distress and to comfort them under it, and sent his prophet to assure them of it, *ver. 12-16*. VI. That, deplorable as the condition of the church now was (*ver. 17-20*), to the same woful circumstances her persecutors and oppressors should shortly be reduced, and worse, *ver. 21-23*. The first three paragraphs of this chapter begin with, "Hearken unto me," and they are God's people that are all along called to hearken; for even when comforts are spoken to them sometimes they "hearken not, through anguish of spirit" (Exod. vi. 9); therefore they are again and again called to hearken, *ver. 1, 4, 7*. The two other paragraphs of this chapter begin with "Awake, awake;" in the former (*ver. 9*) God's people call upon him to awake and help them; in the latter (*ver. 17*) God calls upon them to awake and help themselves.

**H**EARKEN to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock *whence* ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit *whence* ye are digged. 2 Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah *that* bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him. 3 For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.

Observe, 1. How the people of God are here described, to whom the word of this consolation is sent and who are called upon to hearken to it, *v. 1*. They are such as *follow after righteousness*, such as are very desirous and solicitous both to be justified and to be sanctified, are pressing hard after this, to have the favour of God restored to them and the image of God renewed on them. These are those *that seek the Lord*, for it is only in the way of righteousness that we can seek him with any hope of finding him. 2. How they are here directed to look back to their original, and the smallness of their beginning: "Look unto the rock *whence* you were hewn" (the idolatrous family in Ur of the Chaldees, out of which Abraham was taken, the generation of slaves which the heads and fathers of their tribes were in Egypt); "look unto the hole of the pit out of which you were digged, as clay, when God formed you into a people." Note, It is good for those that are privileged by a new birth to consider what they were

by their first birth, how they were conceived in iniquity and shapen in sin. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. How hard was that rock out of which we were hewn, unapt to receive impressions, and how miserable the hole of that pit out of which we were digged! The consideration of this should fill us with low thoughts of ourselves and high thoughts of divine grace. Those that are now advanced would do well to remember how low they began (v. 2): "*Look unto Abraham your father, the father of all the faithful, of all that follow after the righteousness of faith as he did (Rom. iv. 11), and unto Sarah that bore you, and whose daughters you all are as long as you do well. Think how Abraham was called alone, and yet was blessed and multiplied; and let that encourage you to depend upon the promise of God even when a sentence of death seems to be upon all the means that lead to the performance of it. Particularly let it encourage the captives in Babylon, though they are reduced to a small number, and few of them left, to hope that yet they shall increase so as to replenish their own land again.*" When Jacob is very small, yet he is not so small as Abraham was, who yet became father of many nations. "*Look unto Abraham, and see what he got by trusting in the promise of God, and take example by him to follow God with an implicit faith.*"

3. How they are here assured that their present seedness of tears should at length end in a harvest of joys, v. 3. The church of God on earth, even the gospel Zion, has sometimes had her deserts and waste places, many parts of the church, through either corruption or persecution, made like a wilderness, unfruitful to God or uncomfortable to the inhabitants; but God will find out a time and way to *comfort Zion*, not only by speaking comfortably to her, but by acting graciously for her. God has comforts in store even for the *waste places* of his church, for those parts of it that seem not regarded or valued. (1.) He will make them fruitful, and so give them cause to rejoice; her wildernesses shall put on a new face, and look pleasant as Eden, and abound in all good fruits, *as the garden of the Lord*. Note, It is the greatest comfort of the church to be made serviceable to the glory of God, and to be as his garden in which he delights. (2.) He will make them cheerful, and so give them hearts to rejoice. With the *fruits of righteousness, joy and gladness shall be found therein*; for the more holiness men have, and the more good they do, the more gladness they have. And where there is gladness, to their satisfaction, it is fit that there should be thanksgiving, to God's honour; for whatever is the matter of our rejoicing ought to be the matter of our thanksgiving; and the returns of God's favour ought to be celebrated with the voice of melody, which will be the more melodious when God gives *songs in the night, songs in the desert*.

4 Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation: for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light of the people. 5 My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the people; the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust. 6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished. 7 Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings. 8 For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation.

Both these proclamations, as I may call them, end alike with an assurance of the perpetuity of God's righteousness and his salvation; and therefore we put them together, both being designed for the comfort of God's people. Observe,

I. Who they are to whom this comfort belongs: "*My people, and my nation*, that I have set apart for myself, that own me and are owned by me." 'Those are God's people and his nation who are subject to him as their King and their God, pay allegiance to him, and put themselves under his protection accordingly. They are a people who *know righteousness*, who not only have the means of knowledge, and to whom righteousness is made known, but who improve those means, and are able to form a right judgment of truth and falsehood, good and evil. And, as they have good heads, so they have good hearts, for they have the law of God in them, written and ruling there. 'Those God owns for his people *in whose hearts his law is*. Even those who know righteousness, and have the law of God in their hearts, may yet be in great distress and sorrow, and loaded with reproach and contempt; but their God will comfort them with the righteousness they know and the law they have in their hearts.

II. What the comfort is that belongs to God's people. 1. That the gospel of Christ shall be preached and published to the world: *A law shall proceed from me, an evangelical law, the law of Christ, the law*



of faith, *ch. ii. 3.* This law is his judgment; for it is that law of liberty by which the world shall be governed and judged. This shall not only go forth, but shall continue and rest, it shall take firm footing and deep root in the world. It shall rest, not only for the benefit of the Jews, who had the first notice of it, but *for a light of the people of other nations.* It is this law, this judgment, that we are required to hearken and give ear to, at our peril; for how shall we escape if we neglect it and turn a deaf ear to it? When a law proceeds from God, *he that has ears to hear, let him hear.* 2. That this law and judgment shall bring with them righteousness and salvation, shall open a ready way to the children of men, that they may be justified and saved, *v. 5.* These are called *God's righteousness and his salvation*, because of his contriving and bringing them about. The former is a righteousness which he will accept for us and accept us for, and a righteousness which he will work in us and graciously accept of. The latter is the *salvation of the Lord*, for it arises from him and terminates in him. Observe, There is no salvation without righteousness; and, wherever there is the *righteousness of God*, there shall be his salvation. All those, and those only, that are justified and sanctified shall be glorified. 3. That this righteousness and salvation shall very shortly appear: *My righteousness is near.* It is near in time; behold, all things are now ready. It is near in place, not far to seek, but the word is nigh us, and Christ in the word, righteousness in the word, *Rom. x. 8.* *My salvation has gone forth.* The decree has gone forth concerning it; it shall as certainly be introduced as if it had gone forth already, and the time for it is at hand. 4. That this evangelical righteousness and salvation shall not be confined to the Jewish nation, but shall be extended to the Gentiles: *My arms shall judge the people.* Those that will not yield to the judgments of God's mouth shall be crushed by the judgments of his hand. Some shall thus be judged by the gospel, *for for judgment Christ came into this world;* but others, and those of the *isles*, shall wait upon him, and bid his gospel, and the commands as well as the comforts of it, welcome. It was a comfort to God's people, to his nation, that multitudes should be added to them, and the increase of their number should be the increase of their strength and beauty. It is added, *And on my arm shall they trust, that arm of the Lord* which is revealed in Christ, *ch. liii. 1.* Observe, God's arm shall judge the people that are impenitent, and yet on his arm shall others trust and be saved by it; for it is to us as we make it, a savour of life or of death. 5. That this righteousness and salvation shall be for ever, and shall never be abolished, *v. 8.* It is an everlasting righteousness that the Messiah brings in (*Dan. ix. 24*), an eternal redemp-

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tion that he is the author of, *Heb. v. 9.* As it shall spread through all the nations of the earth, so it shall last through all the ages of the world. We must never expect any other way of salvation, any other covenant of peace or rule of righteousness, than what we have in the gospel, and what we have there shall continue to the end, *Matt. xxviii. 20.* It is for ever; for the consequences of it shall be to eternity, and by this law of liberty men's everlasting state will be determined. This perpetuity of the gospel and the blessed things it brings in is illustrated by the fading and perishing of this world and all things in it. Look up to the visible heavens above, which have continued hitherto, and seem likely to continue, but they shall *vanish like smoke* that soon spends itself and disappears; they shall be rolled like a scroll, and their lights shall fall like leaves in autumn. Look down to the earth beneath; that abides too for a short *ever* (*Eccl. i. 4*), but it shall *wax old like a garment* that will be the worse for wearing; *and those that dwell therein*, all the inhabitants of the earth, even those that seem to have the best settlement in it, *shall die in like manner*: the soul shall, as to this world, vanish like smoke, and the body be thrown by like a garment waxen old. They shall be easily crushed (*Job iv. 19*), and no loss of them. But when *heaven and earth pass away*, when all flesh and the glory of it wither as grass, the *word of the Lord endures for ever*, and *not one iota or tittle of that shall fall to the ground.* Those whose happiness is bound up in Christ's righteousness and salvation will have the comfort of it when time and days shall be no more.

III. What use they are to make of this comfort. If God's righteousness and salvation are near to them, then let them *not fear the reproach of men*, of mortal miserable men, nor be *afraid of their revilings* or spiteful taunts, theirs who bid you sing them the songs of Zion, or who ask you, in scorn, *Where is now your God?* Let not those who embrace the gospel righteousness be afraid of those who will call them *Beelzebub*, and will say all manner of evil against them falsely. Let them not be afraid of them; let them not be disturbed by these opprobrious speeches, nor made uneasy by them, as if they would be the ruin of their reputation and honour and they must for ever lie under the load of them. Let them not be afraid of their executing their menaces, nor be deterred thereby from their duty, nor frightened into any sinful compliances, nor driven to take any indirect courses for their own safety. Those can bear but little for Christ that cannot bear a hard word for him. Let us not fear the reproach of men; for, 1. They will be quickly silenced (*v. 8*): *The moth shall eat them up like a garment, ch. l. 9.* *The worm shall eat them like wool*, or woollen cloth. If we have the approbation of a living God, we may despise the censure

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of dying men; the matter is not great what those say of us who must shortly be food for worms. Or it intimates the judgments of God with which they shall be visited, with which they shall be consumed, for their malice against the people of God; they shall be slowly and silently, but effectually destroyed, when God shall come to reckon with them *for all their hard speeches*, Jude 14, 15. 2. The cause we suffer for cannot be run down. The falsehood of their reproaches will be detected, but truth shall triumph, and the righteousness of religion's injured cause shall be for ever plain. Clouds darken the sun, but give no obstruction to his progress.

9 Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. *Art* thou not it that hath cut Rahab, *and* wounded the dragon? 10 *Art* thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over? 11 Therefore the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy *shall be* upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; *and* sorrow and mourning shall flee away. 12 I, *even* I, *am* he that comforteth you: who *art* thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man *that* shall die, and of the son of man *which* shall be made *as* grass; 13 And forgettest the LORD thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? And where *is* the fury of the oppressor? 14 The captive exile hasteneth that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor that his bread should fail. 15 But I *am* the LORD thy God, that divided the sea, whose waves roared: the LORD of hosts *is* his name. 16 And I have put my words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou *art* my people.

In these verses we have,

I. A prayer that God would, in his providence, appear and act for the deliverance of his people and the mortification of his

and their enemies. *Awake, awake! put on strength, O arm of the Lord!* v. 9. The arm of the Lord is Christ, or it is put for God himself, as Ps. xlv. 23. *Awake! why sleepest thou?* He that keeps Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps; but, when we pray that he would awake, we mean that he would make it to appear that he watches over his people and is always awake to do them good. The arm of the Lord is said to awake when the power of God exerts itself with more than ordinary vigour on his people's behalf. When a hand or arm is benumbed we say, It is asleep; when it is stretched forth for action, It awakes. God needs not to be reminded nor excited by us, but he gives us leave thus to be humbly earnest with him for such appearances of his power as will be for his own praise. "*Put on strength*," that is, "*put forth strength: appear in thy strength, as we appear in the clothes we put on*," Ps. xxi. 13. The church sees her case bad, her enemies many and mighty, her friends few and feeble; and therefore she depends purely upon the strength of God's arm for her relief. "*Awake, as in the ancient days*," that is, "*do for us now as thou didst for our fathers formerly, repeat the wonders they told us of*," Judg. vi. 13.

II. The pleas to enforce this prayer. 1. They plead precedents, the experiences of their ancestors, and the great things God had done for them. "*Let the arm of the Lord be made bare on our behalf; for it has done great things formerly in defence of the same cause, and we are sure it is neither shortened nor weakened. It did wonders against the Egyptians, who enslaved and oppressed God's son, his first-born; it cut Rahab to pieces with one direful plague after another, and wounded Pharaoh, the dragon, the Leviathan (as he is called, Ps. lxxiv. 13, 14); it gave him his death's wound. It did wonders for Israel. It dried up the sea, even the waters of the great deep, as far as was requisite to open a way through the sea for the ransomed to pass over*," v. 10. God is never at a loss for a way to accomplish his purposes concerning his people, but will either find one or make one. Past experiences, as they are great supports to faith and hope, so they are good pleas in prayer. *Thou hast: wilt thou not?* Ps. lxxv. 1—6. 2. They plead promises (v. 11): *And the redeemed of the Lord shall return*, that is (as it may be supplied), *thou hast said, They shall*, referring to ch. xxxv. 10, where we find this promise, that the *redeemed of the Lord*, when they are released out of their captivity in Babylon, *shall come with singing unto Zion*. Sinners, when they are brought out of the slavery of sin into the glorious liberty of God's children, may come singing, as a bird got loose out of the cage. The souls of believers, when they are delivered out of the prison of the body, come to the heavenly Zion with singing. Then this promise will



have its full accomplishment, and we may plead it in the mean time. He that designs such joy for us at last will he not work such deliverances for us in the mean time as our case requires? When the saints come to heaven they *enter into the joy of their Lord*; it crowns their heads with immortal honour; it fills their hearts with complete satisfaction. *They shall obtain that joy and gladness* which they could never obtain in this vale of tears. In this world of changes it is a short step from joy to sorrow, but in that world *sorrow and mourning shall flee away*, never to return or come in view again.

III. The answer immediately given to this prayer (v. 12): *I, even I, am he that comforteth you*. They prayed for the operations of his power; he answers them with the consolations of his grace, which may well be accepted as an equivalent. If God do not wound the dragon, and dry the sea, as formerly, yet, if he comfort us in soul under our afflictions, we have no reason to complain. If God do not answer immediately *with the saving strength of his right hand*, we must be thankful if he answer us, as an angel himself was answered (Zech. i. 13), *with good words and comfortable words*. See how God resolves to comfort his people: *I, even I, will do it*. He had ordered his ministers to do it (ch. xl. 1); but, because they cannot reach the heart, he takes the work into his own hands: *I, even I, will do it*. See how he glories in it; he takes it among the titles of his honour to be *the God that comforts those that are cast down*; he delights in being so. Those whom God comforts are comforted indeed; nay, his undertaking to comfort them is comfort enough to them.

1. He comforts those that were in fear; and fear has torment, which calls for comfort. The fear of man has a snare in it which we have need of comfort to preserve us from. He comforts the timorous by chiding them, and that is no improper way of comforting either others or ourselves: *Why art thou cast down, and why disquieted?* v. 12, 13. God, who comforts his people, would not have them disquiet themselves with amazing perplexing fears of the reproach of men (v. 7), or of their growing threatening power and greatness, or of any mischief they may intend against us or our people. Observe,

(1.) The absurdity of those fears. It is a disparagement to us to give way to them: *Who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid?* In the original, the pronoun is feminine, *Who art thou, O woman!* unworthy the name of a man? Such a weak and womanish thing it is to give way to perplexing fears. [1.] It is absurd to be in such dread of a dying man. What! *afraid of a man that shall die*, shall certainly and shortly die, *of the son of man who shall be made as grass*, shall wither and be trodden down or eaten up? The greatest men, and the most for-

midable, that are the *terror of the mighty in the land of the living*, are but men (Ps. ix. 20) and shall *die like men* (Ps. lxxii. 7), are but grass sprung out of the earth, cleaving to it, and retiring again into it. Note, We ought to look upon every man as a man that shall die. Those we admire, and love, and trust to, are men that shall die; let us not therefore delight too much in them nor depend too much upon them. Those we fear we must look upon as frail and mortal, and consider what a foolish thing it is for the servants of the living God to be afraid of dying men, that are here to-day and gone to-morrow. [2.] It is absurd to *fear continually every day* (v. 13), to put ourselves upon a constant rack, so as never to be easy, nor to have any enjoyment of ourselves. Now and then a danger may be imminent and threatening, and it may be prudent to fear it; but to be always in a toss, jealous of dangers at every step, and to tremble at the shaking of every leaf, is to make ourselves all our lifetime *subject to bondage* (Heb. ii. 15), and to bring upon ourselves that sore judgment which is threatened, Deut. xxviii. 66, 67. *Thou shalt fear, day and night*. [3.] It is absurd to fear beyond what there is cause: "*Thou art afraid of the fury of the oppressor*. It is true, there is an oppressor, and he is furious, and he designs, it may be, when he has an opportunity, to do thee a mischief, and it will be thy wisdom therefore to stand upon thy guard; but thou art afraid of him, as if he were ready to destroy, as if he were just now going to cut thy throat, and as if there were no possibility of preventing it." A timorous spirit is thus apt to make the worst of every thing, and to apprehend the danger greater and nearer than really it is. Sometimes God is pleased at once to show us the folly of so doing: "*Where is the fury of the oppressor?*" It is gone in an instant, and the danger is over ere thou art aware." His heart is turned, or his hands are tied. *Pharaoh king of Egypt is but a noise*, and the king of Babylon no more. What has become of all the furious oppressors of God's Israel, that hectoring them, and threatened them, and were a terror to them? they passed away, and, lo, they were not; and so shall these.

(2.) The impiety of those fears: "*Thou art afraid of a man that shall die, and forgettest the Lord thy Maker*, who is also the Maker of all the world, who has stretched forth the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth, and therefore has all the hosts and all the powers of both at his command and disposal." Note, Our inordinate fear of man is a tacit forgetfulness of God. When we disquiet ourselves with the fear of man we forget that there is a God above him, and that the greatest of men have no power but what is given them from above; we forget the providence of God, by which he orders and overrules all events according to the

counsel of his own will; we forget the promises he has made to protect his people, and the experiences we have had of his care concerning us, and his seasonable interposition for our relief many a time, when we thought the oppressor ready to destroy; we forget our Jehovah-jirehs, monuments of mercy in the mount of the Lord. Did we remember to make God our fear and our dread, we should not be so much afraid as we are of the frowns of men, *ch. viii. 12, 13*. Happy is the man that fears God always, *Prov. xxviii. 14; Luke xii. 4, 5*.

2. He comforts those that were in bonds, *v. 14, 15*. See here, (1.) What they do for themselves: *The captive exile hastens that he may be loosed* and may return to his own country, from which he is banished; his care is *that he may not die in the pit* (not die a prisoner, through the inconveniences of his confinement), and that *his bread should not fail*, either the bread he should have to keep him alive in prison or that which should bear his charges home; his stock is low, and therefore he hastens to be loosed. Now some understand this as his fault. He is distrustfully impatient of delays, cannot wait God's time, but thinks he is undone and must die in the pit if he be not released immediately. Others take it to be his praise, that when the doors are thrown open he does not linger, but applies himself with all diligence to procure his discharge. And then it follows, *But I am the Lord thy God*, which intimates, (2.) What God will do for them, even that which they cannot do for themselves. God has all power in his hand to help the captive exiles; for he has *divided the sea*, when the roaring of its waves was more frightful than any of the impotent menaces of proud oppressors. He has *stilled or quieted the sea*, so some think it should be read, *Ps. lxxv. 7; lxxxix. 9*. This is not only a proof of what God can do, but a resemblance of what he has done, and will do, for his people; he will find out a way to still the threatening storm, and bring them safely into the harbour. *The Lord of hosts is his name*, his name for ever, the name by which his people have long known him. And, as he is able to help them, so he is willing and engaged to do it; for he is *thy God*, O captive-exile! thine in covenant. This is a check to the desponding captives. Let them not conclude that they must either be loosed immediately or die in the pit; for he that is the Lord of hosts can relieve them when they are brought ever so low. It is also an encouragement to the diligent captives, who, when liberty is proclaimed, are willing to lose no time; let them know that the Lord is their God, and, while they thus strive to help themselves, they may be sure he will help them.

3. He comforts all his people who depended upon what the prophets said to them in the name of the Lord, and built their

hopes upon it. When the deliverances which the prophets spoke of either did not come so soon as they looked for them or did not come up to the height of their expectation they began to be cast down in their own eyes; but, as to this, they are encouraged (*v. 16*) by what God says to his prophet, not to this only, but to all his prophets, nor to this, or them, principally, but to Christ, the great prophet. It is a great satisfaction to those to whom the message is sent to hear the God of truth and power say to his messenger, as he does here, *I have put my words in thy mouth, that by them I may plant the heavens*. God undertook to comfort his people (*v. 12*); but still he does it by his prophets, by his gospel; and, that he may do it by these, he here tells us, (1.) That his word in them is very true. He owns what they have said to be what he had directed and enjoined them to say: *"I have put my words in thy mouth, and therefore he that receives thee and them receives me."* This is a great stay to our faith, that Christ's doctrine was not his, but his that sent him, and that the words of the prophets and apostles were God's words, which he put into their mouths. God's Spirit not only revealed to them the things themselves they spoke of, but dictated to them the words they should speak (*2 Pet. i. 21; 1 Cor. ii. 13*); so that these are the true sayings of God, of a God that cannot lie. (2.) That it is very safe: *I have covered thee in the shadow of my hand* (as before, *ch. xlix. 2*), which speaks the special protection not only of the prophets, but of their prophecies, not only of Christ, but of Christianity, of the gospel of Christ; it is not only the faithful word of God which the prophets deliver to us, but it shall be carefully preserved till it have its accomplishment for the use of the church, notwithstanding the restless endeavours of the powers of darkness to extinguish this light. They shall *prophecy again* (*Rev. x. 11*), though not in their persons, yet in their writings, which God has always *covered in the shadow of his hand*, preserved by a special providence, else they would have been lost ere this. (3.) That this word, when it comes to be accomplished, will be very great and will not fall short of the pomp and grandeur of the prophecy: *"I have put my words in thy mouth, not that by the performance of them I may plant a nation, or found a city, but that I may plant the heavens and lay the foundations of the earth, may do that for my people which will be a new creation."* This must look as far forward as to the great work done by the gospel of Christ and the setting up of his holy religion in the world. As God by Christ made the world at first (*Heb. i. 2*), and by him formed the Old-Testament church (*Zech. vi. 12*), so by him, and the words put into his mouth, he will set up, [1.] A new world, will again plant the heavens and found the earth. Sin having



put the whole creation into disorder, Christ's taking away the sin of the world put all into order again. *Old things have passed away, all things have become new*; things in heaven and things on earth are reconciled, and so put into a new posture, Col. i. 20. Through him, according to the promise, *we look for new heavens and a new earth* (2 Pet. iii. 13), and to this the prophets bear witness. [2.] He will set up a new church, a New-Testament church: *He will say unto Zion, Thou art my people.* The gospel church is called *Zion* (Heb. xii. 22) and *Jerusalem* (Gal. iv. 26); and, when the Gentiles are brought into it, it shall be said unto them, *You are my people.* When God works great deliverances for his church, and especially when he shall complete the salvation of it in the great day, he will thereby own that poor despised handful to be his people, whom he has chosen and loved.

17 Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the LORD the cup of his fury; thou hast drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling, and wrung them out. 18 *There is none to guide her among all the sons whom she hath brought forth; neither is there any that taketh her by the hand of all the sons that she hath brought up.* 19 These two things are come unto thee; (Who shall be sorry for thee?) desolation, and destruction, and the famine, and the sword: by whom shall I comfort thee? 20 Thy sons have fainted, they lie at the head of all the streets, as a wild bull in a net: they are full of the fury of the LORD, the rebuke of thy God. 21 Therefore hear now this, thou afflicted, and drunken, but not with wine: 22 Thus saith thy Lord the LORD, and thy God that pleadeth the cause of his people, Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again: 23 But I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee; which have said to thy soul, Bow down, that we may go over: and thou hast laid thy body as the ground, and as the street, to them that went over.

God, having awoken for the comfort of his people, here calls upon them to awake, as afterwards, ch. lii. 1. It is a call to awake not so much out of the sleep of sin (though that also is necessary in order to their being

ready for deliverance) as out of the stupor of despair. When the inhabitants of Jerusalem were in captivity they, as well as those who remained upon the spot, were so overwhelmed with the sense of their troubles that they had no heart or spirit to mind any thing that tended to their comfort or relief; they were as the disciples in the garden, *sleeping for sorrow* (Luke xxii. 45), and therefore, when the deliverance came, they are said to have been *like those that dream*, Ps. cxxvi. 1. Nay, it is a call to awake, not only from sleep, but from death, like that to the dry bones to live, Ezek. xxxvii. 9. "Awake, and look about thee, that thou mayest see the day of thy deliverance dawn, and mayest be ready to bid it welcome. Recover thy senses; sink not under thy load, but stand up, and bestir thyself for thy own help." This may be applied to the Jerusalem that was in the apostle's time, which is said to have been *in bondage with her children* (Gal. iv. 25), and to have been under the power of a *spirit of slumber* (Rom. xi. 8); they are called to awake, and mind the things that belonged to their everlasting peace, and then the cup of trembling should be taken out of their hands, peace should be spoken to them, and they should triumph over Satan, who had blinded their eyes and lulled them asleep. Now,

I. It is owned that Jerusalem had long been in a very deplorable condition, and sunk into the depths of misery.

1. She had lain under the tokens of God's displeasure. He had put into her hand the *cup of his fury*, that is, her share of his displeasure. The dispensations of his providence concerning her had been such that she had reason to think he was angry with her. She had provoked him to anger most bitterly, and was made to taste the bitter fruits of it. The cup of God's fury is, and will be, a *cup of trembling* to all those that have it put into their hands: damned sinners will find it so to eternity. It is said (Ps. lxxv. 3) that *the dregs of the cup*, the loathsome sediments in the bottom of it, *all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them*; but here Jerusalem, having made herself as the wicked of the earth, is compelled to wring them out and drink them; for wherever there has been a cup of fornication, as there had been in Jerusalem's hand when she was idolatrous, sooner or later there will be a cup of fury, a cup of trembling. Therefore *stand in awe and sin not*.

2. Those that should have helped her in her distress failed her, and were either unable or unwilling to help her, as might have been expected, v. 18. She is intoxicated with the cup of God's fury, and, being so, staggers, and is very unsteady in her counsels and attempts. She knows not what she says or does, much less knows she what to say or do; and, in this unhappy condition, *of all the sons that she has brought forth and*

brought up, that she has borne and educated (and there were many famous ones, for of Zion it was said *this and that man were born there*, Ps. lxxxvii. 5), *there is none to guide her*, none to take her by the hand to keep her either from falling or from shaming herself, to lend either a hand to help her out of her trouble or a tongue to comfort her under it. Think it not strange if wise and good men are disappointed in their children, and have not that succour from them which they expected, but those that were arrows in their hand prove arrows in their heart, when Jerusalem herself has none of all her sons, prince, priest, nor prophet, that has such a sense either of duty or gratitude as to help her when she has most need of help. Thus they complain, Ps. lxxiv. 9. *There is none to tell us how long.* Now that which aggravated this disappointment was, (1.) That her trouble was very great, and yet there was none to pity or help her: *These two things have come unto thee* (v. 19), to complete thy desolation and destruction, even *the famine and the sword*, two sore judgments, and very terrible. Or the two things were the *desolation and destruction* by which the city was wasted and the famine and sword by which the citizens perished. Or the two things were the trouble itself (made up of desolation, destruction, famine, and sword) and her being helpless, forlorn, and comfortless, under it. "Two sad things indeed, to be in this woeful case, and to have none to pity thee, to sympathize with thee in thy griefs, or to help to bear the burden of thy cares, to have none to comfort thee, by suggesting that to thee which might help to alleviate thy grief or doing that for thee which might help to redress thy grievances." Or these two things that had come upon Jerusalem are the same with the two things that were afterwards to come upon Babylon (*ch. xlvii. 9*), *loss of children and widowhood*—piteous case, and yet, "when thou hast brought it upon thyself by thy own sin and folly, *who shall be sorry for thee?*"—a case that calls for comfort, and yet, when thou art froward under thy trouble, frettest, and makest thyself uneasy, *by whom shall I comfort thee?*" Those that will not be counselled cannot be helped. (2.) That those who should have been her comforters were their own tormentors (v. 20): *They have fainted*, as quite dispirited and driven to despair; they have no patience in which to keep possession of their own souls and the enjoyment of themselves, nor any confidence in God's promise, by which to keep possession of the comfort of that. They throw themselves upon the ground, in vexation at their troubles, and there *they lie at the head of all the streets*, complaining to all that pass by (*Lam. i. 12*), pining away for want of necessary food; there they lie like a wild bull in a net, fretting and raging, struggling and pulling, to help themselves,

but entangling themselves so much the more, and making their condition the worse by their own passions and discontents. Those that are of a meek and quiet spirit are, under affliction, like a dove in a net, mourning indeed, but silent and patient. Those that are of a froward peevish spirit are like a wild bull in a net, uneasy to themselves, vexatious to their friends, and provoking to their God: *They are full of the fury of the Lord, the rebuke of our God.* God is angry with them, and contends with them, and they are full of that only, and take no notice of his wise and gracious designs in afflicting them, never enquire wherefore he contends with them, and therefore nothing appears in them but anger at God and quarrelling with him. They are displeased at God for the dispensations of his providence concerning them, and so they do but make bad worse. This had long been Jerusalem's woeful case, and God took cognizance of it. But,

II. It is promised that Jerusalem's troubles shall at length come to an end, and be transferred to her persecutors (v. 21): *Nevertheless hear this, thou afflicted.* It is often the lot of God's church to be afflicted, and God has always something to say to her then which she will do well to hearken to. "Thou art drunken, not as formerly with wine, not with the intoxicating cup of Babylon's whoredoms and idolatries, but with the cup of affliction. Know then, for thy comfort," 1. "That the Lord Jehovah is thy Lord and thy God, for all this." It is expressed emphatically (v. 22): "Thus saith thy Lord, the Lord, and thy God—the Lord, who is able to help thee, and has wherewithal to relieve thee,—thy Lord, who has an incontestable right to thee, and will not alienate it,—thy God, in covenant with thee, and who has undertaken to make thee happy." Whatever the distresses of God's people may be, he will not disown his relation to them, nor have they lost their interest in him and in his promise. 2. "That he is the God who pleads the cause of his people, as their patron and protector, who takes what is done against them as done against himself." The cause of God's people, and of that holy religion which they profess, is a righteous cause, otherwise the righteous God would not appear for it; yet it may for a time be run down, and seem as if it were lost. But God will plead it, either by convincing the consciences or confounding the mischievous projects of those that fight against it. He will plead it by clearing up the equity and excellency of it to the world and by giving success to those that act in defence of it. It is his own cause; he has espoused it, and therefore will plead it with jealousy. 3. That they should shortly take leave of their troubles and bid a final farewell to them: "I will take out of thy hand the cup of trembling, that bitter cup; it shall pass from thee." Throwing away the cup



of trembling will not do, nor saying, "We will not, we cannot, drink it;" but, if we patiently submit, he that put it into our hands will himself take it out of our hands. Nay, it is promised, "*Thou shalt no more drink it again.*" God has let fall his controversy with thee, and will not revive the judgment." 4. That their persecutors and oppressors should be made to drink of the same bitter cup of which they had drunk so deeply, v. 23. See here, (1.) How insolently they had abused and trampled upon the people of God: *They have said to thy soul, to thee, to thy life, Bow down, that we may go over.* Nay, they have said it to thy conscience, taking a pride and pleasure in forcing thee to worship idols. Herein the New-Testament Babylon treads in the steps of that old oppressor, tyrannizing over men's consciences, giving law to them, putting them upon the rack, and compelling them to sinful compliances. Those that set up an infallible head and judge, requiring an implicit faith in his dictates and obedience to his commands, do in effect say to men's souls, *Bow down, that we may go over,* and they say it with delight. (2.) How meanly the people of God (having by their sin lost much of their courage and sense of honour) truckled to them: *Thou hast laid thy body as the ground.* Observe, The oppressors required souls to be subjected to them, that every man should believe and worship just as they would have them. But all they could gain by their threats and violence was that people laid their bodies on the ground; they brought them to an external and hypocritical conformity, but conscience cannot be forced, nor is it mentioned to their praise that they yielded thus far. But observe, (3.) How justly God will reckon towards his people: *The cup of trembling shall be put into their hand.* Babylon's case shall be as bad as ever Jerusalem's was. Daniel's persecutors shall be thrown into Daniel's den; let them see how they like it. And the Lord is known by these judgments which he executes.

## CHAP. LII.

The greater part of this chapter is on the same subject with the chapter before, concerning the deliverance of the Jews out of Babylon, which yet is applicable to the great salvation Christ has wrought out for us; but the last three verses are on the same subject with the following chapter, concerning the person of the Redeemer, his humiliation and exaltation. Observe, I. The encouragement that is given to the Jews in captivity to hope that God would deliver them in his own way and time, ver. 1-6. II. The great joy and rejoicing that shall be both with ministers and people upon that occasion, ver. 7-10. III. The call given to those that remained in captivity to shift for their own enlargement when liberty was proclaimed, ver. 11, 12. IV. A short idea given here of the Messiah, which is enlarged upon in the next chapter, ver. 13-15.

**A**WAKE, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean. 2 Shake thyself from the dust; arise, and sit

down, O Jerusalem: loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion. 3 For thus saith the LORD, Ye have sold yourselves for nought; and ye shall be redeemed without money. 4 For thus saith the Lord God, My people went down aforetime into Egypt to sojourn there; and the Assyrian oppressed them without cause. 5 Now therefore, what have I here, saith the LORD, that my people is taken away for nought? They that rule over them make them to howl, saith the LORD; and my name continually every day is blasphemed. 6 Therefore my people shall know my name: therefore *they shall know* in that day that *I am* he that doth speak: behold, *it is I*.

Here, I. God's people are stirred up to appear vigorous for their own deliverance, v. 1, 2. They had desired that God would *awake* and *put on his strength*, ch. li. 9. Here he calls upon them to *awake* and *put on their strength*, to bestir themselves; let them awake from their despondency, and pluck up their spirits, encourage themselves and one another with the hope that all will be well yet, and no longer succumb and sink under their burden. Let them awake from their distrust, look above them, look about them, look into the promises, look into the providences of God that were working for them, and let them raise their expectations of great things from God. Let them awake from their dullness, sluggishness, and incontinency, and raise up their endeavours, not to take any irregular courses for their own relief, contrary to the law of nations concerning captives, but to use all likely means to recommend themselves to the favour of the conqueror and make an interest with him. God here gives them an assurance, 1. That they should be reformed by their captivity: *There shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean* (v. 1); their idolatrous customs should be no more introduced, or at least not harboured; for when by the marriage of strange wives, in Ezra's time and Nehemiah's, the unclean crept in, they were soon by the vigilance and zeal of the magistrates expelled again, and care was taken that Jerusalem should be a holy city. Thus the gospel Jerusalem is purified by the blood of Christ and the grace of God, and made indeed a holy city. 2. That they should be relieved and rescued out of their captivity, that the bands of their necks should be loosed, that they should not now be any longer oppressed, nay, that they should not be any more invaded, as they had been: *There shall no more come against thee* (so it may be read) *the uncircumcised and the un-*

clean. The heathen shall not again enter into God's sanctuary and profane his temple, Ps. lxxix. 1. This must be understood with a condition. If they keep close to God, and keep in with him, God will keep off, will keep out the enemy; but, if they again corrupt themselves, Antiochus will profane their temple and the Romans will destroy it. However, for some time they shall have peace. And to this happy change, now approaching, they are here called to accommodate themselves. (1.) Let them prepare for joy: "*Put on thy beautiful garments, no longer to appear in mourning weeds and the habit of thy widowhood. Put on a new face, a smiling countenance, now that a new and pleasant scene begins to open.*" The beautiful garments were laid up then, when the harps were hung on the willow trees; but, now there is occasion for both, let both be resumed together. "Put on thy strength, and, in order to that, put on thy beautiful garments, in token of triumph and rejoicing." Note, *The joy of the Lord will be our strength* (Neh. viii. 10), and our beautiful garments will serve for armour of proof against the darts of temptation and trouble. And observe, Jerusalem must put on her beautiful garments when she becomes a holy city, for the beauty of holiness is the most amiable beauty, and the more holy we are the more cause we have to rejoice. (2.) Let them prepare for liberty: "*Shake thyself from the dust in which thou hast lain, and into which thy proud oppressors have trodden thee* (ch. li. 23), or into which thou hast in thy extreme sorrow rolled thyself." *Arise, and set up*; so it may be read. "O Jerusalem! prepare to get clear of all the marks of servitude thou hast been under and to shift thy quarters: *Loose thyself from the bands of thy neck*; be inspired with generous principles and resolutions to assert thy own liberty." The gospel proclaims liberty to those who were bound with fears and makes it their duty to take hold of their liberty. Let those who have been weary and heavily laden under the burden of sin, finding relief in Christ, shake themselves from the dust of their doubts and fears and loose themselves from those bands; for, *if the Son make them free, they shall be free indeed*.

II. God stirs up himself to appear jealous for the deliverance of his people. He here pleads their cause with himself, and even stirs up himself to come and save them, for his reasons of mercy are fetched from himself. Several things he here considers.

1. That the Chaldeans who oppressed them never acknowledged God in the power they gained over his people, meant not so, Sennacherib did, who, when God made use of him as an instrument for the correction and reformation of his people, meant not so, ch. x. 6, 7. "*You have sold yourselves for nought*; you got nothing by it, nor did I," v. 3. (God considers that when they by sin had sold themselves he himself, who had

the prior, nay, the sole, title to them, *did not increase his wealth by their price*, Ps. xlv. 12. They did not so much as pay their debts to him with it; the Babylonians gave him no thanks for them, but rather reproached and blasphemed his name upon that account.) "And therefore they, having so long had you for nothing, shall at last restore you for nothing: *You shall be redeemed without price*," as was promised, ch. xlv. 13. Those that give nothing must expect to get nothing; however, God is a debtor to no man.

2. That they had been often before in similar distress, had often smarted for a time under the tyranny of their task-masters, and therefore it was a pity that they should now be left always in the hand of these oppressors (v. 4): "*My people went down into Egypt, in an amicable way to settle there; but they enslaved them, and ruled them with rigour.*" And then they were delivered, notwithstanding the pride, and power, and policies of Pharaoh. And why may we not think God will deliver his people now? At other times *the Assyrian oppressed the people of God without cause*, as when the ten tribes were carried away captive by the king of Assyria; soon afterwards Sennacherib, another Assyrian, with a destroying army oppressed and made himself master of all the defended cities of Judah. The Babylonians might not unfitly be called *Assyrians*, their monarchy being a branch of the Assyrians; and they now oppressed them without cause. Though God was righteous in delivering them into their hands, they were unrighteous in using them as they did, and could not pretend a dominion over them as their subjects, as Pharaoh might when they were settled in Goshen, a part of his kingdom. When we suffer by the hands of wicked and unreasonable men it is some comfort to be able to say that as to them it is without cause, that we have not given them any provocation, Ps. vii. 3—5, &c.

3. That God's glory suffered by the injuries that were done to his people (v. 5): "*What have I here, what do I get by it, that my people are taken away for nought?*" God is not worshipped as he used to be in Jerusalem, his altar there is gone and his temple in ruins; but if, in lieu of that, he were more and better worshipped in Babylon, either by the captives or by the natives, it were another matter—God might be looked upon as in some respects a gainer in his honour by it; but, alas! it is not so. (1.) The captives are so dispirited that they cannot praise him; instead of this they are continually howling, which grieves him and moves his pity: "*Those that rule over them make them to howl*, as the Egyptians of old made them to sigh, Exod. ii. 23. So the Babylonians now, using them more hardly, extorted from them louder complaints and made them to howl. This gives us no pleasing idea of the temper the



captives were now in; their complaints were not so rational and pious as they should have been, but brutish rather; they *howled*, Hos. vii. 14. However God heard them, and came down to deliver them, as he did out of Egypt, Exod. iii. 7, 8. (2.) The natives are so insolent that they will not praise him, but, instead of that, they are continually blaspheming, which affronts him and moves his anger. They boasted that they were too hard for God because they were too hard for his people, and set him at defiance, as unable to deliver them, and thus his name continually every day was blasphemed among them. When they praised their own idols they *lifted up themselves against the Lord of heaven*, Dan. v. 23. "Now," says God, "this is not to be suffered. I will go down to deliver them; for what honour, what rent, what tribute of praise have I from the world, when my people, who should be to me for a name and a praise, are to me for a reproach? For their oppressors will neither praise God themselves nor let them do it." The apostle quotes this with application to the wicked lives of the Jews, by which God was dishonoured among the Gentiles then, as much as now he was by their sufferings, Rom. ii. 23, 24.

4. That his glory would be greatly manifested by their deliverance (v. 6): "*Therefore, because my name is thus blasphemed, I will arise, and my people shall know my name, my name Jehovah.*" By this name he had made himself known in delivering them out of Egypt, Exod. vi. 3. God will do something to vindicate his own honour, something for his great name; and his people, who have almost lost the knowledge of it, shall know it to their comfort and shall find it their strong tower. They shall know that God's providence governs the world, and all the affairs of it, that it is he who speaks deliverance for them by the word of his power, that it is he only, who at first spoke and it was done. They shall know that God's word, which Israel is blessed with above other nations, shall without fail have its accomplishment in due season, that it is he who speaks by the prophet; it is he, and they do not speak of themselves; for not one iota or tittle of what they say shall fall to the ground.

7 How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! 8 Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion. 9 Break forth into joy, sing together,

ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the LORD hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem. 10 The LORD hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. 11 Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD. 12 For ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight: for the LORD will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your reward.

The removal of the Jews from Babylon to their own land again is here spoken of both as a mercy and as a duty; and the application of v. 7 to the preaching of the gospel (by the apostle, Rom. x. 15) plainly intimates that that deliverance was a type and figure of the redemption of mankind by Jesus Christ, to which what is here said of their redemption out of Babylon ought to be accommodated.

I. It is here spoken of as a great blessing, which ought to be welcomed with abundance of joy and thankfulness. 1. Those that bring the tidings of their release shall be very acceptable (v. 7): *How beautiful upon the mountains, the mountains round about Jerusalem, over which these messengers are seen coming at a distance, how beautiful are their feet, when it is known what tidings they bring!* It is not meant so much of the common posts, or the messengers sent express by the government to disperse the proclamation, but rather of some of the Jews themselves, who, being at the fountain-head of intelligence, had early notice of it, and immediately went themselves, or sent their own messengers, to all parts, to disperse the news, and even to Jerusalem itself, to tell the few who remained there that their brethren would be with them shortly; for it is published not merely as matter of news, but as a proof that Zion's God reigns, for in that language it is published: they say unto Zion, *Thy God reigns.* Those who bring the tidings of peace and salvation, that Cyrus has given orders for the release of the Jews, tidings which were so long expected by those that waited for the consolation of Israel, those *good tidings* (so the original reads it, without the tautology of our translation, *good tidings of good*), put this construction upon it, *O Zion! thy God reigns.* Note, When bad news is abroad this is good news, and when good news is abroad this is the best news, that Zion's God reigns, that God is Zion's God, in covenant with her, and as such he reigns, Ps. cxlvi. 10; Zech. ix. 9. *The Lord has founded Zion*, ch. xiv. 32. All events have their rise in the disposals of



the kingdom of his providence and their tendency to the advancement of the kingdom of his grace. This must be applied to the preaching of the gospel, which is a proclamation of peace and salvation; it is gospel indeed, good news, glad tidings, tidings of victory over our spiritual enemies and liberty from our spiritual bondage. The good news is that the Lord Jesus reigns and all power is given to him. Christ himself brought these tidings first (Luke iv. 13, Heb. ii. 3), and of him the text speaks: *How beautiful are his feet!* his feet that were nailed to the cross, how beautiful upon Mount Calvary! his feet when he came *leaping upon the mountains* (Cant. ii. 8), how beautiful were they to those who knew his voice and knew it to be the voice of their beloved! His ministers proclaim these good tidings; they ought to keep their feet clean from the pollutions of the world, and then they ought to be beautiful in the eyes of those to whom they are sent, who sit at their feet, or rather at Christ's in them, to hear his word. They must be *esteemed in love for their work's sake* (1 Thess. v. 13), for their message sake, which is well worthy of all acceptance. 2. Those to whom the tidings are brought shall be put thereby into a transport of joy. (1.) Zion's watchmen shall then rejoice because they are surprisingly illuminated, v. 8. The watchmen on Jerusalem's walls shall lead the chorus in this triumph. Who they were we are told, ch. lxii. 6. They were such as God set on the walls of Jerusalem, to make mention of his name, and to continue instant in prayer to him, till he again *made Jerusalem a praise in the earth*. These watchmen stand upon their watch-tower, waiting for an answer to their prayers (Hab. ii. 1); and therefore when the good news comes they have it first, and the longer they have continued and the more importunate they have been in praying for it the more will they be elevated when it comes: *They shall lift up the voice, with the voice together shall they sing* in concert, to invite others to join with them in their praises. And that which above all things will transport them with pleasure is that *they shall see eye to eye*, that is, face to face. Whereas God had been a God hiding himself, and they could scarcely discern any thing of his favour through the dark cloud of their afflictions, now that the cloud is scattered they shall plainly see it. They shall see *Zion's king eye to eye*; so it was fulfilled when the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and there were those that *saw his glory* (John i. 14) and *looked upon it*, 1 John i. 1. They shall see an exact agreement and correspondence between the prophecy and the event, the promise and the performance; they shall see how they look one upon another eye to eye, and be satisfied that the same God spoke the one and did the other. When the Lord shall bring again Zion out of her captivity the

prophets shall thence receive and give fuller discoveries than ever of God's good-will to his people. Applying this also, as the foregoing verse, to gospel times, it is a promise of the pouring out of the Spirit upon gospel ministers, as a spirit of wisdom and revelation, to lead them into all truth, so that they shall see eye to eye, shall see God's grace more clearly than the Old-Testament saints could see it: and they shall herein be unanimous; in these great things concerning the common salvation they shall concur in their sentiments as well as their songs. Nay, St. Paul seems to allude to this when he makes it the privilege of our future state that *we shall see face to face*. (2.) Zion's waste places shall then rejoice because they shall be surprisingly comforted (v. 9): *Break forth into joy, sing together, you waste places of Jerusalem*; that is, all parts of Jerusalem, for it was all in ruins, and even those parts that seemed to lie most desolate shall share in the joy; and they, having little expected it, shall break forth into joy, as men that dream, Ps. cxvi. 1, 2. Let them sing together. Note, Those that share in mercies ought to join in praises. Here is matter for joy and praise. [1.] God's people will have the comfort of this salvation; and what is the matter of our rejoicing ought to be the matter of our thanksgiving. *He has redeemed Jerusalem* (the inhabitants of Jerusalem that were sold into the hands of their enemies) and thereby he has *comforted his people* that were in sorrow. The redemption of Jerusalem is the joy of all God's people, whose character it is that they look for that redemption, Luke ii. 38. [2.] God will have the glory of it, v. 10. *He has made bare his holy arm* (manifested and displayed his power) *in the eyes of all the nations*. God's arm is a holy arm, stretched out in purity and justice, in defence of holiness and in pursuance of his promise. [3.] All the world will have the benefit of it. In the great salvation wrought out by our Lord Jesus the *arm of the Lord was revealed and all the ends of the earth were made to see the great salvation*, not as spectators of it only, as they saw the deliverance of the Jews out of Babylon, but as sharers in it; some of all nations, the most remote, shall partake of the benefits of the redemption. This is applied to our salvation by Christ. Luke iii. 6, *All flesh shall see the salvation of God, that great salvation*.

II. It is here spoken of as a great business, which ought to be managed with abundance of care and circumspection. When the liberty is proclaimed, 1. Let the people of God hasten out of Babylon with all convenient speed; though they are ever so well settled there, let them not think of taking root in Babylon, but *Depart, depart* (v. 11), *go out from the midst of her*; not only those that are in the borders, but those that are in the midst, in the heart of the country, let them



be gone. Babylon is no place for Israelites. As soon as they have leave to go, let them lose no time. With this word God stirred up the spirits of those that were moved to go up, Ezra i. 5. And it is a call to all those who are yet in the bondage of sin and Satan to make use of the liberty which Christ has proclaimed to them. And, if the Son make them free, they shall be free indeed. 2. Let them take heed of carrying away with them any of the pollutions of Babylon: *Touch no unclean thing.* Now that God makes bare his holy arm for you, *be you holy as he is, and keep yourselves from every wicked thing.* When they came out of Egypt they brought with them the idolatrous customs of Egypt (Ezek. xxiii. 3), which were their ruin; let them take heed of doing so now that they come out of Babylon. Note, When we are receiving any special mercy from God we ought more carefully than ever to watch against all impurity. But especially let those be clean who bear the vessels of the Lord, that is, the priests, who had the charge of the vessels of the sanctuary (when they were restored by a particular grant) to carry them to Jerusalem, Ezra i. 7; viii. 24, &c. Let them not only avoid touching any unclean thing, but be very careful to *cleanse themselves according to the purification of the sanctuary.* Christians are made to our God spiritual priests, Rev. i. 6. They are to bear the vessels of the Lord, are entrusted to keep the ordinances of God pure and entire; it is a good thing that is committed to them, and they ought to be clean, to wash their hands in innocency and so to compass God's altars and carry his vessels, and keep themselves pure. 3. Let them depend upon the presence of God with them and his protection in their removal (v. 12): *You shall not go out with haste.* They were to go with a diligent haste, not to lose time nor linger as Lot in Sodom, but they were not to go with a diffident distrustful haste, as if they were afraid of being pursued (as when they came out of Egypt) or of having the orders for their release recalled and countermanded: no, they shall find that, as for God, his work is perfect, and therefore they need not make more haste than good speed. Cyrus shall give them an honourable discharge, and they shall have an honourable return, and not steal away; *for the Lord will go before them as their general and commander-in-chief, and the God of Israel will be their rearward,* or he that will gather up those that are left behind. God will both lead their van and bring up their rear; he will secure them from enemies that either meet them or follow them, for with his favour will he compass them. The pillar of cloud and fire, when they came out of Egypt, sometimes went behind them, to secure their rear (Exod. xiv. 19), and God's presence with them would now be that to them which that pillar was a visible token of. Those that are in

the way of their duty are under God's special protection; and he that believes this will not make haste.

13 Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. 14 As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men: 15 So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.

Here, as in other places, for the confirming of the faith of God's people and the encouraging of their hope in the promises of temporal deliverances, the prophet passes from them to speak of the great salvation which should in the fulness of time be wrought out by the Messiah. As the prophecy of Christ's incarnation was intended for the ratification of the promise of their deliverance from the Assyrian army, so this of Christ's death and resurrection is to confirm the promise of their return out of Babylon; for both these salvations were typical of the great redemption and the prophecies of them had a reference to that. This prophecy, which begins here and is continued to the end of the next chapter, points as plainly as can be at Jesus Christ; the ancient Jews understood it of the Messiah, though the modern Jews take a great deal of pains to pervert it, and some of ours (no friends therein to the Christian religion) will have it understood of Jeremiah; but Philip, who hence preached Christ to the eunuch, has put it past dispute that of him speaks the prophet this, of him and of no other man, Acts viii. 34, 35. Here,

I. God owns Christ to be both commissioned and qualified for his undertaking. 1. He is appointed to it. "*He is my servant, whom I employ and therefore will uphold.*" In his undertaking he does his Father's will, seeks his Father's honour, and serves the interests of his Father's kingdom. 2. He is qualified for it. *He shall deal prudently, for the spirit of wisdom and understanding shall rest upon him, ch. xi. 2.* The word is used concerning David when he behaved himself wisely, 1 Sam. xviii. 14. Christ is wisdom itself, and, in the contriving and carrying on the work of our redemption, there appeared much of the wisdom of God in a mystery, 1 Cor. ii. 7. Christ, when he was here upon earth, dealt very prudently, to the admiration of all.

II. He gives a short prospect both of his humiliation and his exaltation. See here, 1. How he humbled himself: *Many were astonished at him,* as they were at David when by reason of his sorrows and troubles



he became a *wonder unto many*, Ps. lxxi. 7. Many wondered to see what base usage he met with, how inveterate people were against him, how inhuman, and what indignities were done him: *His visage was marred more than any man's* when he was buffeted, smitten on the cheek, and crowned with thorns, and *hid not his face from shame and spitting*. *His face was foul with weeping*, for he was a *man of sorrows*; he that really was *fairer than the children of men* had his face spoiled with the abuses that were done him. Never was man used so barbarously; his form, when he took upon him *the form of a servant*, was more mean and abject than that of any of the sons of men. Those that saw him said, "Surely never man looked so miserably, a *worm and no man*," Ps. xxii. 6. *The nation abhorred him* (ch. xlix. 7), treated him as the *off-scouring of all things*. Never was sorrow like unto his sorrow. 2. How highly God exalted him, and exalted him because he humbled himself. Three words are used for this (v. 13): *He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high*. God shall exalt him, men shall extol him, and with both he shall be very high, higher than the highest, higher than the heavens. He shall prosper in his work, and succeed in it, and that shall raise him very high. (1.) Many nations shall be the better for him, for *he shall sprinkle them*, and not the Jews only; the blood of sprinkling shall be applied to their consciences, to purify them. He suffered, and died, and so sprinkled many nations; for in his death there was a *fountain opened*, Zech. xiii. 1. He shall sprinkle many nations by his heavenly doctrine, which shall drop as the rain and distil as the dew. Moses's did so only on one nation (Deut. xxxii. 2), but Christ's on many nations. He shall do it by baptism, which is the washing of the body with pure water, Heb. x. 22. So that this promise had its accomplishment when Christ sent his apostles to disciple all nations, by baptizing or sprinkling them. (2.) The great ones of the nation shall show him respect: *Kings shall shut their mouths at him*, that is, they shall not open their mouths against him, as they have done, to contradict and blaspheme his sacred oracles; nay, they shall acquiesce in, and be well pleased with, the methods he takes of setting up his kingdom in the world; they shall with great humility and reverence receive his oracles and laws, as those who, when they heard Job's wisdom, *after his speech spoke not again*, Job xxix. 9, 22. *Kings shall see and arise*, ch. xlix. 7. (3.) The mystery which was kept secret from the beginning of the world shall by him be *made known to all nations for the obedience of faith*, as the apostle speaks, Rom. xvi. 25, 26. *That which had not been told them shall they see*; the gospel brings to light things new and unheard of, which will awaken the attention and engage the reverence of kings and kingdoms. This

is applied to the preaching of the gospel in the Gentile world, Rom. xv. 21. These words are there quoted according to the Septuagint translation: *To whom he was not spoken of they shall see, and those that have not heard shall understand*. As the things revealed had long been kept secret, so the persons to whom they were revealed had long been kept in the dark; but now they shall see and consider the glory of God shining in the face of Christ, which before they had not been told of—*they had not heard*. That shall be discovered to them by the gospel of Christ which could never be told them by all the learning of their philosophers, or the art of their diviners, or any of their pagan oracles. Much had been said in the Old Testament concerning the Messiah; much had been told them, and they had heard it. But, as the queen of Sheba found concerning Solomon, what they shall see in him, when he comes, shall far exceed what had been told them. Christ disappointed the expectations of those who looked for a Messiah according to their fancies, as the carnal Jews, but outdid theirs who looked for such a Messiah as was promised. According to their faith, nay, and beyond it, it was to them.

## CHAP. LIII.

The two great things which the Spirit of Christ in the Old-Testament prophets testified beforehand were the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow, 1 Pet. i. 11. And that which Christ himself, when he expounded Moses and all the prophets, showed to be the drift and scope of them all was that Christ ought to suffer and then to enter into his glory, Luke xxiv. 26, 27. But nowhere in all the Old-Testament are these two so plainly and fully prophesied of as here in this chapter, out of which divers passages are quoted with application to Christ in the New-Testament. This chapter is so replenished with the unsearchable riches of Christ that it may be called rather the gospel of the evangelist Isaiah than the prophecy of the prophet Isaiah. We may observe here, I. The reproach of Christ's sufferings—the meanness of his appearance, the greatness of his grief, and the prejudices which many conceived in consequence against his doctrine, ver. 1–3. II. The rolling away of this reproach, and the stamping of immortal honour upon his sufferings, notwithstanding the disgrace and ignominy of them, by four considerations:—1. That therein he did his Father's will, ver. 4, 6, 10. 2. That thereby he made atonement for the sin of man (ver. 4–6, 8, 11, 12), for it was not for any sin of his own that he suffered, ver. 9. 3. That he bore his sufferings with an invincible and exemplary patience, ver. 7. 4. That he should prosper in his undertaking, and his sufferings should end in his immortal honour, ver. 10–12. By mixing faith with the prophecy of this chapter we may improve our acquaintance with Jesus Christ and him crucified, with Jesus Christ and him glorified, dying for our sins and rising again for our justification.

**WHO** hath believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? 2 For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, *there is no beauty that we should desire him*. 3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were *our faces from him*; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

The prophet, in the close of the former chapter, had foreseen and foretold the kind reception which the gospel of Christ should find among the Gentiles, that nations and



their kings should bid it welcome, that those who had not seen him should believe in him; and though they had not any prophecies among them of gospel grace, which might raise their expectations, and dispose them to entertain it, yet upon the first notice of it they should give it its due weight and consideration. Now here he foretels, with wonder, the unbelief of the Jews, notwithstanding the previous notices they had of the coming of the Messiah in the Old Testament and the opportunity they had of being personally acquainted with him. Observe here,

I. The contempt they put upon the gospel of Christ, *v.* 1. The unbelief of the Jews in our Saviour's time is expressly said to be the fulfilling of this word, John xii. 38. And it is applied likewise to the little success which the apostles' preaching met with among Jews and Gentiles, Rom. x. 16. Note, 1. Of the many that hear the report of the gospel there are few, very few, that believe it. It is reported openly and publicly, not whispered in a corner, or confined to the schools, but proclaimed to all; and it is so faithful a saying, and so well worthy of all acceptation, that one would think it should be universally received and believed. But it is quite otherwise; few believed the prophets who spoke before of Christ; when he came himself none of the rulers nor of the Pharisees followed him, and but here and there one of the common people; and, when the apostles carried this report all the world over, some in every place believed, but comparatively very few. To this day, of the many that profess to believe this report, there are few that cordially embrace it and submit to the power of it. 2. Therefore people believe not the report of the gospel, because *the arm of the Lord is not revealed* to them; they do not discern, nor will be brought to acknowledge, that divine power which goes along with the word. *The arm of the Lord is made bare* (as was said, *ch.* lii. 10) in the miracles that were wrought to confirm Christ's doctrine, in the wonderful success of it, and its energy upon the conscience; though it is a still voice, it is a strong one; but they do not perceive this, nor do they experience in themselves that working of the Spirit which makes the word effectual. They believe not the gospel because, by rebelling against the light they had, they had forfeited the grace of God, which therefore he justly denied them and withheld from them, and for want of that they believed not. 3. This is a thing we ought to be much affected with; it is to be wondered at, and greatly lamented, and ministers may go to God and complain of it to him, as the prophet here. What a pity is it that such rich grace should be received in vain, that precious souls should perish at the pool's side because they will not step in and be healed!

II. The contempt they put upon the person of Christ because of the meanness of his appearance, *v.* 2, 3. This seems to come in as a reason why they rejected his doctrine, because they were prejudiced against his person. When he was on earth many that heard him preach, and could not but approve of what they heard, would not give it any regard or entertainment, because it came from one that made so small a figure and had no external advantages to recommend him. Observe here,

1. The low condition he submitted to, and how he abased and emptied himself. The entry he made into the world, and the character he wore in it, were no way agreeable to the ideas which the Jews had formed of the Messiah and their expectations concerning him, but quite the reverse. (1.) It was expected that his extraction would be very great and noble. He was to be the Son of David, of a family that had a *name like to the names of the great men that were in the earth*, 2 Sam. vii. 9. But he sprang out of this royal and illustrious family when it was reduced and sunk, and Joseph, that son of David, who was his supposed father, was but a poor carpenter, perhaps a ship-carpenter, for most of his relations were fishermen. This is here meant by his being a *root out of a dry ground*, his being born of a mean and despicable family, in the north, in Galilee, of a family out of which, like a dry and desert ground, nothing green, nothing great, was expected, in a country of such small repute that it was thought no good thing could come out of it. His mother, being a virgin, was as dry ground, yet from her he sprang who is not only fruit, but root. The seed on the stony ground had no root; but, though Christ grew out of a dry ground, he is both *the root and the offspring of David*, the root of the good olive. (2.) It was expected that he should make a public entry, and come in pomp and with observation; but, instead of that, he grew up before God, not before men. God had his eye upon him, but men regarded him not: *He grew up as a tender plant*, silently and insensibly, and without any noise, as the corn, that tender plant, grows up, *we know not how*, Mark iv. 27. Christ rose as a tender plant, which, one would have thought, might easily be crushed, or might be nipped in one frosty night. The gospel of Christ, in its beginning, was as a grain of mustard-seed, so inconsiderable did it seem, Matt. xiii. 31, 32. (3.) It was expected that he should have some uncommon beauty in his face and person, which should charm the eye, attract the heart, and raise the expectations of all that saw him. But there was nothing of this kind in him; not that he was in the least deformed or misshapen, but *he had no form nor comeliness*, nothing extraordinary, which one might have thought to meet with in the countenance of an in-



carnate deity. Those who saw him could not see that there was any beauty in him *that they should desire him, nothing in him more than in another beloved*, Cant. v. 9. Moses when he was born, was exceedingly fair, to such a degree that it was looked upon as a happy presage, Acts vii. 20; Heb. xi. 23. David, when he was anointed, was *of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to*, 1 Sam. xvi. 12. But our Lord Jesus had nothing of that to recommend him. Or it may refer not so much to his person as to the manner of his appearing in the world, which had nothing in it of sensible glory. His gospel is preached, *not with the enticing words of man's wisdom*, but with all plainness, agreeable to the subject. (4.) It was expected that he should live a pleasant life, and have a full enjoyment of all the delights of the sons and daughters of men, which would have invited all sorts to him; but, on the contrary, he was *a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*. It was not only his last scene that was tragical, but his whole life was so, not only mean, but miserable,

— but one continued chain

Of labour, sorrow, and consuming pain.

SIR R. BLACKMORE.

Thus, being *made sin for us*, he underwent the sentence sin had subjected us to, that we should *eat in sorrow all the days of our life* (Gen. iii. 17), and thereby relaxed much of the rigour and extremity of the sentence as to us. His condition was, upon many accounts, sorrowful. He was unsettled, had not where to lay his head, lived upon alms, was opposed and menaced, and *endured the contradiction of sinners against himself*. His spirit was tender, and he admitted the impressions of sorrow. We never read that he laughed, but often that he wept. Lentulus, in his epistle to the Roman senate concerning Jesus, says, "*He was never seen to laugh;*" and so worn and macerated was he with continual grief that when he was but a little above thirty years of age he was taken to be nearly fifty, John viii. 57. Grief was his intimate acquaintance; for he acquainted himself with the grievances of others, and sympathized with them, and he never set his own at a distance; for in his transfiguration he talked of his own decease, and in his triumph he wept over Jerusalem. Let us look unto him and mourn.

2. The low opinion that men had of him, upon this account. Being generally apt to judge of persons and things by the sight of the eye, and according to outward appearance, they saw no beauty in him that they should desire him. There was a great deal of true beauty in him, the beauty of holiness and the beauty of goodness, enough to render him *the desire of all nations*; but the far greater part of those among whom he lived, and conversed, saw none of this beauty, for it was spiritually discerned. Carnal hearts see no excellency in the Lord Jesus,

nothing that should induce them to desire an acquaintance with him or interest in him. Nay, he is not only not desired, but *he is despised and rejected*, abandoned and abhorred, a reproach of men, an abject, one that men were shy of keeping company with and had not any esteem for, a worm and no man. He was despised as a mean man, rejected as a bad man. He was the stone which the builders refused; they would not have him to reign over them. Men, who should have had so much reason as to understand things better, so much tenderness as not to trample upon a man in misery—men whom he came to seek and save rejected him: "*We hid as it were our faces from him*, looked another way, and his sufferings were as nothing to us; though *never sorrow was like unto his sorrow*. Nay, we not only behaved as having no concern for him, but as loathing him, and having him in detestation." It may be read, *He hid as it were his face from us*, concealed the glory of his majesty, and drew a veil over it, and therefore *he was despised and we esteemed him not*, because we could not see through that veil. Christ having undertaken to make satisfaction to the justice of God for the injury man had done him in his honour by sin (and God cannot be injured except in his honour), he did it not only by divesting himself of the glories due to an incarnate deity, but by submitting himself to the disgraces due to the worst of men and malefactors; and thus by vilifying himself he glorified his Father: but this is a good reason why we should esteem him highly, and study to do him honour; let him be received by us whom men rejected.

4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. 5 But he *was* wounded for our transgressions, *he was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. 8 He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? For he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.



9 And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither *was any* deceit in his mouth.

In these verses we have,

I. A further account of the sufferings of Christ. Much was said before, but more is said here, of the very low condition to which he abased and humbled himself, to which he became obedient even to the death of the cross. 1. He had griefs and sorrows; being acquainted with them, he kept up the acquaintance, and did not grow shy, no, not of such melancholy acquaintance. Were griefs and sorrows allotted him? He bore them, and blamed not his lot; he carried them, and did neither shrink from them, nor sink under them. The load was heavy and the way long, and yet he did not tire, but persevered to the end, till he said, *It is finished*. 2. He had blows and bruises; he was *stricken, smitten, and afflicted*. His sorrows bruised him; he felt pain and smart from them; they touched him in the most tender part, especially when God was dishonoured, and when he forsook him upon the cross. All along he was smitten with the tongue, when he was cavilled at and contradicted, put under the worst of characters, and had all manner of evil said against him. At last he was smitten with the hand, with blow after blow. 3. He had wounds and stripes. He was scourged, not under the merciful restriction of the Jewish law, which allowed not above forty stripes to be given to the worst of malefactors, but according to the usage of the Romans. And his scourging, doubtless, was the more severe because Pilate intended it as an equivalent for his crucifixion, and yet it proved a preface to it. He was wounded in his hands, and feet, and side. Though it was so ordered that not a bone of him should be broken, yet he had scarcely in any part a whole skin (how fond soever we are to sleep in one, even when we are called out to suffer for him), but from the crown of his head, which was crowned with thorns, to the soles of his feet, which were nailed to the cross, nothing appeared but wounds and bruises. 4. He was wronged and abused (v. 7): *He was oppressed*, injuriously treated and hardly dealt with. That was laid to his charge which he was perfectly innocent of, that laid upon him which he did not deserve, and in both he was oppressed and injured. *He was afflicted* both in mind and body; being oppressed, he laid it to heart, and, though he was patient, was not stupid under it, but mingled his tears with those of the oppressed, that have no comforter, because *on the side of the oppressors there is power*, Eccl. iv. 1. Oppression is a sore affliction; it has made many a wise man mad (Eccl. vii. 7); but our Lord Jesus, though, when he was oppressed, he was afflicted, kept possession

of his own soul. 5. He was judged and imprisoned, as is implied in his being *taken from prison and judgment*, v. 8. God having made him sin for us, he was proceeded against as a malefactor; he was apprehended and taken into custody, and made a prisoner; he was judged, accused, tried, and condemned, according to the usual forms of law: God filed a process against him, judged him in pursuance of that process, and confined him in the prison of the grave, at the door of which a stone was rolled and sealed. 6. He was *cut off* by an untimely death *from the land of the living*, though he lived a most useful life, did so many good works, and they were all such that one would be apt to think it was for some of them that they stoned him. He was stricken to the death, to the grave which he made *with the wicked* (for he was crucified between two thieves, as if he had been the worst of the three) and yet *with the rich*, for he was buried in a sepulchre that belonged to Joseph, an honourable counsellor. Though he died with the wicked, and according to the common course of dealing with criminals should have been buried with them in the place where he was crucified, yet God here foretold, and Providence so ordered it, that he should make his grave with the innocent, with the rich, as a mark of distinction put between him and those that really deserved to die, even in his sufferings.

II. A full account of the meaning of his sufferings. It was a very great mystery that so excellent a person should suffer such hard things; and it is natural to ask with amazement, "How came it about? What evil had he done?" His enemies indeed looked upon him as suffering justly for his crimes; and, though they could lay nothing to his charge, they *esteemed him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted*, v. 4. Because they hated him, and persecuted him, they thought that God did, that he was his enemy and fought against him; and therefore they were the more enraged against him, saying, *God has forsaken him; persecute and take him*, Ps. lxxi. 11. Those that are justly smitten are smitten of God, for by him princes decree justice; and so they looked upon him to be smitten, justly put to death as a blasphemer, a deceiver, and an enemy to Cæsar. Those that saw him hanging on the cross enquired not into the merits of his cause, but took it for granted that he was guilty of every thing laid to his charge and that therefore vengeance suffered him not to live. Thus Job's friends esteemed him smitten of God, because there was something uncommon in his sufferings. It is true he was *smitten of God*, v. 10 (or, as some read it, *he was God's smitten and afflicted*), the Son of God, though smitten and afflicted, but not in the sense in which they meant it; for, though he suffered all these things,

1. He never did any thing in the least to



deserve this hard usage. Whereas he was charged with perverting the nation, and sowing sedition, it was utterly false; he had done no violence, but went about doing good. And, whereas he was called *that deceiver*, he never deserved that character; for *there was no deceit in his mouth* (v. 9), to which the apostle refers, 1 Pet. ii. 22. *He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.* He never offended either in word or deed, nor could any of his enemies take up that challenge of his, *Which of you convinceth me of sin?* The judge that condemned him owned he found no fault in him, and the centurion that executed him professed that certainly he was a righteous man.

2. He conducted himself under his sufferings so as to make it appear that he did not suffer as an evil-doer; for, though he was *oppressed and afflicted*, yet he *opened not his mouth* (v. 7), no, not so much as to plead his own innocence, but freely offered himself to suffer and die for us, and objected nothing against it. This takes away the scandal of the cross, that he voluntarily submitted to it, for great and holy ends. By his wisdom he could have evaded the sentence, and by his power have resisted the execution; but *thus it was written, and thus it behoved him to suffer.* This commandment he received from his Father, and therefore he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, without any difficulty or reluctance (he is the *Lamb of God*); and as a *sheep is dumb before the shearers*, nay, before the butchers, so he *opened not his mouth*, which denotes not only his exemplary patience under affliction (Ps. xxxix. 9), and his meekness under reproach (Ps. xxxviii. 13), but his cheerful compliance with his Father's will. *Not my will, but thine be done. Lo, I come.* By this will we are sanctified, his making his own soul, his own life, an offering for our sin.

3. It was for our good, and in our stead, that Jesus Christ suffered. This is asserted here plainly and fully, and in a very great variety of emphatical expressions.

(1.) It is certain that we are all guilty before God. We have all sinned, and have come short of the glory of God (v. 6): *All we like sheep have gone astray*, one as well as another. The whole race of mankind lies under the stain of original corruption, and every particular person stands charged with many actual transgressions. We have all gone astray from God our rightful owner, alienated ourselves from him, from the ends he designed us to move towards and the way he appointed us to move in. We have gone astray like sheep, which are apt to wander, and are unapt, when they have gone astray, to find the way home again. That is our true character; we are bent to backslide from God, but altogether unable of ourselves to return to him. This is mentioned not only as our infelicity (that we go astray from the green pastures and expose our-

selves to the beasts of prey), but as our iniquity. We affront God in going astray from him, for we turn aside every one to his own way, and thereby set up ourselves, and our own will, in competition with God and his will, which is the malignity of sin. Instead of walking obediently in God's way, we have turned wilfully and stubbornly to our own way, the way of our own heart, the way that our own corrupt appetites and passions lead us to. We have set up for ourselves, to be our own masters, our own carvers, to do what we will and have what we will. Some think it intimates our own evil way, in distinction from the evil way of others. Sinners have their own iniquity, their beloved sin, which does most easily beset them, their own evil way, that they are particularly fond of and bless themselves in.

(2.) Our sins are our sorrows and our griefs (v. 4), or, as it may be read, *our sicknesses and our wounds*: the LXX. read it, *our sins*; and so the apostle, 1 Pet. ii. 24. Our original corruptions are the sickness and disease of the soul, an habitual indisposition; our actual transgressions are the wounds of the soul, which put conscience to pain, if it be not seared and senseless. Or our sins are called our *griefs and sorrows* because all our griefs and sorrows are owing to our sins and our sins deserve all our griefs and sorrows, even those that are most extreme and everlasting.

(3.) Our Lord Jesus was appointed and did undertake to make satisfaction for our sins and so to save us from the penal consequences of them. [1.] He was appointed to do it, by the will of his Father; *for the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.* God chose him to be the Saviour of poor sinners, and would have him to save them in this way, by bearing their sins and the punishment of them; not the *idem*—the same that we should have suffered, but the *tantundem*—that which was more than equivalent for the maintaining of the honour of the holiness and justice of God in the government of the world. Observe here, *First*, In what way we are saved from the ruin to which by sin we had become liable—by laying our sins on Christ, as the sins of the offerer were laid upon the sacrifice and those of all Israel upon the head of the scape-goat. Our sins were *made to meet upon him* (so the margin reads it); the sins of all that he was to save, from every place and every age, met upon him, and he was met with for them. They were made to fall upon him (so some read it) as those rushed upon him that came with swords and staves to take him. The laying of our sins upon Christ implies the taking of them off from us; we shall not fall under the curse of the law if we submit to the grace of the gospel. They were laid upon Christ when he was *made sin* (that is, a sin-offering) *for us*, and redeemed us from the curse of the law by *being made a curse for us*; thus he put himself into a capacity to



make those easy that come to him heavily laden under the burden of sin. \*See Ps. xl. 6—12. *Secondly*, By whom this was appointed. It was the Lord that laid our iniquities on Christ; he contrived this way of reconciliation and salvation, and he accepted of the vicarious satisfaction Christ was to make. Christ was delivered to death *by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*. None but God had power to lay our sins upon Christ, both because the sin was committed against him and to him the satisfaction was to be made, and because Christ, on whom the iniquity was to be laid, was his own Son, the Son of his love, and his holy child Jesus, who himself knew no sin. *Thirdly*, For whom this atonement was to be made. It was *the iniquity of us all* that was laid on Christ; for in Christ there is a sufficiency of merit for the salvation of all, and a serious offer made of that salvation to all, which excludes none that do not exclude themselves. It intimates that this is the one only way of salvation. All that are justified are justified by having their sins laid on Jesus Christ, and, though they were ever so many, he is able to bear the weight of them all. [2.] He undertook to do it. God laid upon him our iniquity; but did he consent to it? Yes, he did; for some think that the true reading of the next words (v. 7) is, *It was exacted, and he answered*; divine justice demanded satisfaction for our sins, and he engaged to make the satisfaction. He became our surety, not as originally bound with us, but as bail to the action: "Upon me be the curse, my Father." And therefore, when he was seized, he stipulated with those into whose hands he surrendered himself that that should be his disciples' discharge: *If you seek me, let these go their way*, John xviii. 8. By his own voluntary undertaking he made himself responsible for our debt, and it is well for us that he was responsible. Thus *he restored that which he took not away*.

(4.) Having undertaken our debt, he underwent the penalty. Solomon says: *He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it*. Christ, being surety for us, did smart for it. [1.] *He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows*, v. 4. He not only submitted to the common infirmities of human nature, and the common calamities of human life, which sin had introduced, but he underwent the extremities of grief, when he said, *My soul is exceedingly sorrowful*. He made the sorrows of this present time heavy to himself, that he might make them light and easy for us. Sin is the wormwood and the gall in the affliction and the misery. Christ bore our sins, and so *bore our griefs*, bore them off us, that we should never be pressed above measure. This is quoted (Matt. viii. 17) with application to the compassion Christ had for the sick that came to him to be cured and the power he put forth to cure them.

[2.] He did this by suffering for our sins (v. 5): *He was wounded for our transgressions*, to make atonement for them and to purchase for us the pardon of them. Our sins were the thorns in his head, the nails in his hands and feet, the spear in his side. Wounds and bruises were the consequences of sin, what we deserved and what we had brought upon ourselves, ch. i. 6. That these wounds and bruises, though they are painful, may not be mortal, *Christ was wounded for our transgressions*, was tormented or pained (the word is used for the pains of a woman in travail) for our revolts and rebellions. *He was bruised*, or crushed, *for our iniquities*; they were the procuring cause of his death. To the same purport is v. 8, *for the transgression of my people was he smitten, the stroke was upon him* that should have been upon us; and so some read it, *He was cut off for the iniquity of my people, unto whom the stroke belonged, or was due*. He was delivered to death for our offences, Rom. iv. 25. Hence it is said to be *according to the scriptures*, according to this scripture, that *Christ died for our sins*, 1 Cor. xv. 3. Some read this, *by the transgressions of my people*; that is, by the wicked hands of the Jews, who were, in profession, God's people. he was stricken, was crucified and slain, Acts ii. 23. But, doubtless, we are to take it in the former sense, which is abundantly confirmed by the angel's prediction of the Messiah's undertaking, solemnly delivered to Daniel, that he shall *finish transgression, make an end of sin, and make reconciliation for iniquity*, Dan. ix. 24.

(5.) The consequence of this to us is our peace and healing, v. 5. [1.] Hereby we have peace: *The chastisement of our peace was upon him*; he, by submitting to these chastisements, slew the enmity, and settled an amity, between God and man; *he made peace by the blood of his cross*. Whereas by sin we had become odious to God's holiness and obnoxious to his justice, through Christ God is reconciled to us, and not only forgives our sins and saves us from ruin, but takes us into friendship and fellowship with himself, and thereby *peace* (that is, all good) *comes unto us*, Col. i. 20. *He is our peace*, Eph. ii. 14. Christ was in pain that we might be at ease; he gave satisfaction to the justice of God that we might have satisfaction in our own minds, might be of good cheer, knowing that through him our sins are forgiven us. [2.] Hereby we have healing; *for by his stripes we are healed*. Sin is not only a crime, for which we were condemned to die and which Christ purchased for us the pardon of, but it is a disease, which tends directly to the death of our souls and which Christ provided for the cure of. By his stripes (that is, the sufferings he underwent) he purchased for us the Spirit and grace of God to mortify our corruptions, which are the distempers of our souls, and to put our

souls in a good state of health, that they may be fit to serve God and prepared to enjoy him. And by the doctrine of Christ's cross, and the powerful arguments it furnishes us with against sin, the dominion of sin is broken in us and we are fortified against that which feeds the disease.

(6.) The consequence of this to Christ was his resurrection and advancement to perpetual honour. This makes the offence of the cross perfectly to cease; he yielded himself to die as a sacrifice, as a lamb, and, to make it evident that the sacrifice he offered of himself was accepted, we are told here, v. 8, [1.] That he was discharged: *He was taken from prison and from judgment*; whereas he was imprisoned in the grave under a judicial process, lay there under an arrest for our debt, and judgment seemed to be given against him, he was by an express order from heaven taken out of the prison of the grave, an angel was sent on purpose to roll away the stone and set him at liberty, by which the judgment given against him was reversed and taken off; this redounds not only to his honour, but to our comfort; for, being *delivered for our offences*, he was *raised again for our justification*. That discharge of the bail amounted to a release of the debt. [2.] That he was preferred: *Who shall declare his generation? his age, or continuance* (so the word signifies), the time of his life? He rose to die no more; death had no more dominion over him. He that was dead is alive, and lives for evermore; and who can describe that immortality to which he rose, or number the years and ages of it? And he is advanced to this eternal life because for the transgression of his people he became obedient to death. We may take it as denoting the time of his usefulness, as David is said to *serve his generation*, and so to answer the end of living. Who can declare how great a blessing Christ by his death and resurrection will be to the world? Some by *his generation* understand his spiritual seed: Who can count the vast numbers of converts that shall by the gospel be begotten to him, like the dew of the morning?

When thus exalted he shall live to see

A numberless believing progeny

Of his adopted sons; the godlike race

Exceed the stars that heav'n's high arches

grace.

Sir R. BLACKMORE.

Of this generation of his let us pray, as Moses did for Israel, *The Lord God of our fathers make them a thousand times so many more as they are, and bless them as he has promised them*, Deut. i. 11.

10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his

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hand. 11 He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

In the foregoing verses the prophet had testified very particularly of the sufferings of Christ, yet mixing some hints of the happy issue of them; here he again mentions his sufferings, but largely foretells the glory that should follow. We may observe, in these verses,

I. The services and sufferings of Christ's state of humiliation. Come, and see how he loved us, see what he did for us.

1. He submitted to the frowns of Heaven (v. 10): *Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him, to put him to pain, or torment, or grief*. The scripture nowhere says that Christ in his sufferings underwent the wrath of God; but it says here, (1.) That the Lord bruised him, not only permitted men to bruise him, but awakened his own sword against him, Zech. xiii. 7. They esteemed him smitten of God for some very great sin of his own (v. 4); now it was true that he was smitten of God, but it was for our sin; the Lord bruised him, for he *did not spare him, but delivered him up for us all*, Rom. viii. 32. He it was that put the bitter cup into his hand, and obliged him to drink it (John xviii. 11), having laid upon him our iniquity. He it was that made him sin and a curse for us, and turned to ashes all his burnt-offering, in token of the acceptance of it, Ps. xx. 3. (2.) That he bruised him so as to put him to grief. Christ accommodated himself to this dispensation, and received the impressions of grief from his Father's delivering him up; and he was troubled to such a degree that it put him into an agony, and he began to be amazed and very heavy. (3.) It pleased the Lord to do this. He determined to do it; it was the result of an eternal counsel; and he delighted in it, as it was an effectual method for the salvation of man and the securing and advancing of the honour of God.

2. He substituted himself in the room of sinners, as a sacrifice. He *made his soul an offering for sin*; he himself explains this (Matt. xx. 28), that *he came to give his life a ransom for many*. When men brought bulls and goats as sacrifices for sin they made them offerings, for they had an interest in them, God having put them under the feet



of man. But Christ made himself an offering; it was his own act and deed. We could not put him in our stead; but he put himself, and said, *Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit*, in a higher sense than David said, or could say it. "Father, *I commit my soul to thee*, I deposit it in thy hands, as the life of a sacrifice and the price of pardons." Thus he shall bear the iniquities of the many that he designed to justify (v. 11), shall take away the sin of the world by taking it upon himself, John i. 29. This is mentioned again (v. 12): *He bore the sin of many*, who, if they had borne it themselves, would have been sunk by it to the lowest hell. See how this is dwelt upon; for, whenever we think of the sufferings of Christ, we must see him in them bearing our sin.

3. He subjected himself to that which to us is the wages of sin (v. 12): *He has poured out his soul unto death*, poured it out as water, so little account did he make of it, when the laying of it down was the appointed means of our redemption and salvation. He *loved not his life unto the death*, and his followers, the martyrs, did likewise, Rev. xii. 11. Or, rather, he poured it out as a drink-offering, to make his sacrifice complete, poured it out as wine, that his blood might be drink indeed, as his flesh is meat indeed to all believers. There was not only a collocation of his body in his sufferings (Ps. xxii. 14, *I am poured out like water*), but a surrender of his spirit; he poured out that, even unto death, though he is the Lord of life.

4. He suffered himself to be ranked with sinners, and yet offered himself to be an intercessor for sinners, v. 12. (1.) It was a great aggravation of his sufferings that he was *numbered with transgressors*, that he was not only condemned as a malefactor, but executed in company with two notorious malefactors, and he in the midst, as if he had been the worst of the three, in which circumstance of his suffering, the evangelist tells us, this prophecy was fulfilled, Mark xv. 27, 28. Nay, the vilest malefactor of all, Barabbas, who was a traitor, a thief, and a murderer, was put in election with him for the favour of the people, and carried it; for they would not have Jesus released, but Barabbas. In his whole life he was numbered among the transgressors; for he was called and accounted a sabbath-breaker, a drunkard, and a friend to publicans and sinners. (2.) It was a great commendation of his sufferings, and redounded very much to his honour, that in his sufferings he *made intercession for the transgressors*, for those that reviled and crucified him; for he prayed, *Father, forgive them*, thereby showing, not only that he forgave them, but that he was now doing that upon which their forgiveness, and the forgiveness of all other transgressors, were to be founded. That prayer was the language of his blood, crying, not for vengeance, but for mercy, and therein

it speaks better things than that of Abel, even for those who with wicked hands shed it.

II. The graces and glories of his state of exaltation; and the graces he confers on us are not the least of the glories conferred on him. These are secured to him by the covenant of redemption, which these verses give us some idea of. He promises to make his soul an offering for sin, consents that the Father shall deliver him up, and undertakes to bear the sin of many, in consideration of which the Father promises to glorify him, not only with the glory he had, as God, before the world was (John xvii. 5), but with the glories of the Mediator.

1. He shall have the glory of an everlasting Father. Under this title he was *brought into the world* (ch. ix. 6), and he shall not fail to answer the title when he goes out of the world. This was the promise made to Abraham (who herein was a type of Christ), that he should be *the father of many nations* and so be *the heir of the world*, Rom. iv. 13, 17. As he was the root of the Jewish church, and the covenant was made with him and his seed, so is Christ of the universal church and with him and his spiritual seed is the covenant of grace made, which is grounded upon and grafted in the covenant of redemption, which here we have some of the glorious promises of. It is promised,

(1.) That the Redeemer shall have a seed to serve him and to bear up his name, Ps. xxii. 30. True believers are the seed of Christ; the Father gave them to him to be so, John xvii. 6. He died to purchase and purify them to himself, fell to the ground as a corn of wheat, that he might *bring forth much fruit*, John xii. 24. The word, that incorruptible seed, of which they are born again, is his word; the Spirit, the great author of their regeneration, is his Spirit; and it is his image that is impressed upon them.

(2.) That he shall live to see his seed. Christ's children have a living Father, and because he lives they shall live also, for he is their life. Though he died, he rose again, and left not his children orphans, but took effectual care to secure to them the spirit, the blessing, and the inheritance of sons. He shall see a great increase of them; the word is plural, *He shall see his seeds*, multitudes of them, so many that they cannot be numbered.

(3.) That he shall himself continue to take care of the affairs of this numerous family: *He shall prolong his days*. Many, when they see their seed, their seed's seed, wish to depart in peace; but Christ will not commit the care of his family to any other, no, he shall himself live long, and *of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end*, for he ever lives. Some refer it to believers: *He shall see a seed that shall prolong its days*, agreeing with Ps. lxxxix. 29, 36, *His seed shall endure for ever*. While

the world stands Christ will have a church in it, which he himself will be the life of.

(4.) That his great undertaking shall be successful and shall answer expectation: *The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.* God's purposes shall take effect, and not one iota or tittle of them shall fail. Note, [1.] The work of man's redemption is in the hands of the Lord Jesus, and it is in good hands. It is well for us that it is in his, for our own hands are not sufficient for us, but he is able to save to the uttermost. It is in his hands who upholds all things. [2.] It is the good pleasure of the Lord, which denotes not only his counsel concerning it, but his complacency in it; and therefore God loved him, and was well pleased in him, because he undertook to lay down his life for the sheep. [3.] It has prospered hitherto, and shall prosper, whatever obstructions or difficulties have been, or may be, in the way of it. Whatever is undertaken according to God's pleasure shall prosper, *ch. xvi. 10.* Cyrus, a type of Christ, shall perform all God's pleasure (*ch. xlv. 28*), and therefore, no doubt, Christ shall. Christ was so perfectly well qualified for his undertaking, and prosecuted it with so much vigour, and it was from first to last so well devised, that it could not fail to prosper, to the honour of his Father and the salvation of all his seed.

(5.) That he shall himself have abundant satisfaction in it (*v. 11*): *He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.* He shall see it beforehand (so it may be understood); he shall with the prospect of his sufferings have a prospect of the fruit, and he shall be satisfied with the bargain. He shall see it when it is accomplished in the conversion and salvation of poor sinners. Note, [1.] Our Lord Jesus was in travail of soul for our redemption and salvation, in great pain, but with longing desire to be delivered, and all the pains and throes he underwent were in order to it and hastened it on. [2.] Christ does and will see the blessed fruit of the travail of his soul in the founding and building up of his church and the eternal salvation of all that were given him. He will not come short of his end in any part of his work, but will himself see that he has not laboured in vain. [3.] The salvation of souls is a great satisfaction to the Lord Jesus. He will reckon all his pains well bestowed, and himself abundantly recompensed, if the many sons be by him brought through grace to glory. Let him have this, and he has enough. God will be glorified, penitent believers will be justified, and then Christ will be satisfied. Thus, in conformity to Christ, it should be a satisfaction to us if we can do any thing to serve the interests of God's kingdom in the world. Let it always be our meat and drink, as it was Christ's, to do God's will.

2. He shall have the glory of bringing in an everlasting righteousness; for so it was

foretold concerning him, *Dan. ix. 24.* And here, to the same purport, *By his knowledge* (the knowledge of him, and faith in him) *shall my righteous servant justify many;* for he shall bear the sins of many, and so lay a foundation for our justification from sin. Note, (1.) The great privilege that flows to us from the death of Christ is justification from sin, our being acquitted from that guilt which alone can ruin us, and accepted into God's favour, which alone can make us happy. (2.) Christ, who purchased our justification for us, applies it to us, by his intercession made for us, his gospel preached to us, and his Spirit witnessing in us. The Son of man had power even on earth to forgive sin. (3.) There are many whom Christ justifies, not all (multitudes perish in their sins), yet many, even as many as he gave his life a ransom for, as many as the Lord our God shall call. He shall justify not here and there one that is eminent and remarkable, but those of the many, the despised multitude. (4.) It is by faith that we are justified, by our consent to Christ and the covenant of grace; in this way we are saved, because thus God is most glorified, free grace most advanced, self most abased, and our happiness most effectually secured. (5.) Faith is the knowledge of Christ, and without knowledge there can be no true faith. Christ's way of gaining the will and affections is by enlightening the understanding and bringing that unfeignedly to assent to divine truths. (6.) That knowledge of Christ, and that faith in him, by which we are justified, have reference to him both as a servant to God and as a surety for us. [1.] As one that is employed for God to pursue his designs and secure and advance the interests of his glory. "He is my righteous servant, and as such justifies men." God has authorized and appointed him to do it; it is according to God's will and for his honour that he does it. He is himself righteous, and of his righteousness have all we received. He that is himself righteous (for he could not have made atonement for our sin if he had had any sin of his own to answer for) is *made of God to us righteousness, the Lord our righteousness.* [2.] As one that has undertaken for us. We must know him, and believe in him, as one that bore our iniquities—saved us from sinking under the load by taking it upon himself.

3. He shall have the glory of obtaining an incontestable victory and universal dominion, *v. 12.* Because he has done all these good services, *therefore will I divide him a portion with the great,* and, according to the will of the Father, *he shall divide the spoil with the strong,* as a great general, when he has driven the enemy out of the field, takes the plunder of it for himself and his army, which is both an unquestionable evidence of the victory and a recompense for all the toils and perils of the battle. Note, (1.) God the Father has



engaged to reward the services and sufferings of Christ with great glory: "I will set him among the great, highly exalt him, and give him a name above every name." Great riches are also assigned to him: *He shall divide the spoil*, shall have abundance of graces and comforts to bestow upon all his faithful soldiers. (2.) Christ comes at his glory by conquest. He has set upon the strong man armed, dispossessed him, and divided the spoil. He has vanquished principalities and powers, sin and Satan, death and hell, the world and the flesh; these are the strong that he has disarmed and taken the spoil of. (3.) Much of the glory with which Christ is recompensed, and the spoil which he has divided, consists in the vast multitudes of willing, faithful, loyal subjects, that shall be brought in to him; for so some read it: *I will give many to him, and he shall obtain many for a spoil*. God will give him the heathen for his inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession, Ps. ii. 8. *His dominion shall be from sea to sea*. Many shall be wrought upon by the grace of God to give up themselves to him to be ruled, and taught, and saved by him, and hereby he shall reckon himself honoured, and enriched, and abundantly recompensed for all he did and all he suffered. (4.) What God designed for the Redeemer he shall certainly gain the possession of: "I will divide it to him," and immediately it follows, *He shall divide it*, notwithstanding the opposition that is given to him; for, as Christ finished the work that was given him to do, so God completed the recompence that was promised him for it; for he is both able and faithful. (5.) The spoil which God divided to Christ he divides (it is the same word), he distributes, among his followers; for, when he led *captivity captive*, he received gifts for men, that he might give gifts to men; for as he has told us (Acts xx. 35) he did himself reckon it more blessed and honourable to give than to receive. Christ conquered for us, and through him we are more than conquerors. He has divided the spoils, the fruits of his conquest, to all that are his: let us therefore cast in our lot among them.

## CHAP. LIV.

The death of Christ is the life of the church and of all that truly belong to it; and therefore very fitly, after the prophet had foretold the sufferings of Christ, he foretels the flourishing of the church, which is a part of his glory, and that exaltation of him which was the reward of his humiliation: it was promised him that he should see his seed, and this chapter is an explication of that promise. It may easily be granted that it has a primary reference to the welfare and prosperity of the Jewish church after their return out of Babylon, which (as other things that happened to them) was typical of the glorious liberty of the children of God, which through Christ we are brought into; yet it cannot be denied but that it has a further and principal reference to the gospel church, into which the Gentiles were to be admitted. And the first words being understood by the apostle Paul of the New-Testament Jerusalem (Gal. iv. 26, 27) may serve as a key to the whole chapter and that which follows. It is here promised concerning the Christian church, 1. That, though the beginnings of it were small, it should be greatly enlarged by the accession of many to it among the Gentiles, who had been wholly destitute of church privileges, ver. 1—5. 11. That though sometimes God might seem to withdraw from her, and suspend the tokens of his favour, he would return in mercy and would not return to contend with them any more, ver. 6—10. 11. That, though for a while she was in sorrow and under oppres-

sion, she should at length be advanced to greater honour and splendour than ever, ver. 11, 12. 14. That knowledge, righteousness, and peace, should flourish and prevail, ver. 13, 14. 17. That all attempts against the church should be baffled, and she should be secured from the malice of her enemies, ver. 14—17.

SING, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord. 2 Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; 3 For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited. 4 Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more. 5 For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; the God of the whole earth shall he be called.

If we apply this to the state of the Jews after their return out of captivity, it is a prophecy of the increase of their nation after they were settled in their own land. Jerusalem had been in the condition of a wife written childless, or a desolate solitary widow; but now it is promised that the city should be replenished and the country peopled again, that not only the ruins of Jerusalem should be repaired, but the suburbs of it extended on all sides and a great many buildings erected upon new foundations,—that those estates which had for many years been wrongfully held by the Babylonian Gentiles should now return to the right owners. God will again be a husband to them, and the reproach of their captivity, and the small number to which they were then reduced, shall be forgotten. And it is to be observed that, by virtue of the ancient promise made to Abraham of the increase of his seed, when they were restored to God's favour they multiplied greatly. Those that first came out of Babylon were but 42,000 (Ezra ii. 64), about a fifteenth part of their number when they came out of Egypt; many came dropping to them afterwards, but we may suppose that to be the greatest number that ever came in a body; and yet above 500 years after, a little before their destruction by the Romans, a calculation was made by the number of the paschal lambs, and the lowest computation by that rule

(allowing only ten to a lamb, whereas they might be twenty) made the nation to be nearly three millions. Josephus says, seven and twenty hundred thousand and odd, *De Bell. Jud. lib. 7. cap. 17.* But we must apply it to the church of God in general; I mean the kingdom of God among men, God's city in the world, the children of God incorporated. Now observe,

I. The low and languishing state of religion in the world for a long time before Christianity was brought in. It was like one barren, that did not bear, or travail with child, was like one desolate, that had lost husband and children; the church lay in a little compass, and brought forth little fruit. The Jews were indeed by profession married to God, but few proselytes were added to them, the rising generations were unpromising, and serious godliness manifestly lost ground among them. The Gentiles had less religion among them than the Jews; their proselytes were in a dispersion; and the children of God, like the children of a broken, reduced family, were scattered abroad (John xi. 52), did not appear nor make any figure.

II. Its recovery from this low condition by the preaching of the gospel and the planting of the Christian church.

1. Multitudes were converted from idols to the living God. Those were the church's children that were born again, were partakers of a new and divine nature, by the word. *More were the children of the desolate than of the married wife*; there were more good people found in the Gentile church (when that was set up) that had long been afar off, and without God in the world, than ever were found in the Jewish church. God's sealed ones out of the tribes of Israel are numbered (Rev. vii. 4), and they were but a remnant compared with the thousands of Israel; but those of other nations were so many, and crowded in so thickly, and lay so much scattered in all parts, that no man could number them, v. 9. Sometimes more of the power of religion is found in those places and families that have made little show of it, and have enjoyed but little of the means of grace, than in others that have distinguished themselves by a flourishing profession; and then more are the children of the desolate, more the fruits of their righteousness, than those of the married wife; so the last shall be first. Now this is spoken of as matter of great rejoicing to the church, which is called upon to break forth into singing upon this account. The increase of the church is the joy of all its friends and strengthens their hands. The longer the church has lain desolate the greater will the transports of its joy be when it begins to recover the ground it has lost and to gain more. Even in heaven, among the angels of God, there is an uncommon joy for a sinner that repents, much more for a nation that does so. If the barren fig-tree at length

bring forth fruit, it is well; it shall rejoice, and others with it.

2. The bounds of the church were extended much further than ever before, v. 2, 3. (1.) It is here supposed that the present state of the church is a tabernacle state; it dwells in tents, like the heirs of promise of old (Heb. xi. 9); its dwelling is mean and movable, and of no strength against a storm. The city, the continuing city, is reserved for hereafter. A tent is soon taken down and shifted, so the candlestick of church privileges is soon removed out of its place (Rev. ii. 5), and, when God pleases, it is as soon fixed elsewhere. (2.) Though it be a tabernacle state, it is sometimes very remarkably a growing state; and, if this family increase, no matter though it be in a tent. Thus it was in the first preaching of the gospel; it was the business of the apostles to disciple all nations, to stretch forth the curtains of the church's habitation, to preach the gospel where Christ had not yet been named (Rom. xv. 20), to leaven with the gospel those towns and countries that had hitherto been strangers to it, and so to lengthen the cords of this tabernacle, that more might be enclosed, which would make it necessary to strengthen the stakes proportionably, that they might bear the weight of the enlarged curtains. The more numerous the church grows the more cautious she must be to fortify herself against errors and corruptions, and to support her seven pillars, Prov. ix. 1. (3.) It was a proof of divine power going along with the gospel that in all places it grew and prevailed mightily, Acts xix. 20. It broke forth, as the breaking forth of waters—on the right hand and on the left, that is, on all hands. The gospel spread itself into all parts of the world; there were eastern and western churches. The church's seed inherited the Gentiles, and the cities that had been desolate (that is, destitute of the knowledge and worship of the true God) came to be inhabited, that is, to have religion set up in them and the name of Christ professed.

3. This was the comfort and honour of the church (v. 4): "*Fear not, for thou shalt not be ashamed*, as formerly, of the straitness of thy borders, and the fewness of thy children, which thy enemies upbraided thee with, but shalt forget the reproach of thy youth, because there shall be no more ground for that reproach." It was the reproach of the Christian religion, in its youth, that none of the rulers or princes of this world embraced it and that it was entertained and professed by a despicable handful of men; but, after awhile, nations were disciplined, the empire became Christian, and then this reproach of its youth was forgotten.

4. This was owing to the relation in which God stood to his church, as her husband (v. 5): *Thy Maker is thy husband*. Believers are said to be married to Christ, that they



may bring forth fruit unto God (Rom. vii. 4); so the church is married to him, that she may bear and bring up a holy seed to God, that shall be accounted to him for a generation. Jesus Christ is the church's Maker, by whom she is formed into a people—her Redeemer, by whom she is brought out of captivity, the bondage of sin, the worst of slaveries. This is he that espoused her to himself; and, (1.) He is *the Lord of hosts*, who has an irresistible power, an absolute sovereignty, and a universal dominion! Kings who are lords of some hosts, find there are others who are lords of other hosts, as many and mighty as theirs; but God is the Lord of all hosts. (2.) He is *the Holy One of Israel*, the same that presided in the affairs of the Old-Testament church and was the Mediator of the covenant made with it. The promises made to the New-Testament Israel are as rich and sure as those made to the Old-Testament Israel; for he that is our Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel. (3.) He is and shall be called *the Lord of the whole earth*, as God, and as Mediator, for he is the heir of all things; but *then* he shall be called so, when the ends of the earth shall be made to see his salvation, when all the earth shall call him their God and have an interest in him. Long he had been called, in a peculiar manner, *the God of Israel*; but now, the partition wall between Jew and Gentile being taken down, he shall be called *the God of the whole earth* even where he has been, as at Athens itself, an *unknown God*.

6 For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. 7 For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. 8 In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer. 9 For this *is as* the waters of Noah unto me: for *as* I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. 10 For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee.

The seasonable succour and relief which God sent to his captives in Babylon, when they had a discharge from their bondage there, are here foretold, as a type and figure

of all those consolations of God which are treasured up for the church in general and all believers in particular, in the covenant of grace.

1. Look back to former troubles, and in comparison with them God's favours to his people appear very comfortable, v. 6—8. Observe, 1. How sorrowful the church's condition had been. She had been as a woman forsaken, whose husband was dead, or had fallen out with her, though she was *a wife of youth*, upon which account she is grieved in spirit, takes it very ill, frets, and grows melancholy upon it; or she had been as one refused and rejected, and therefore full of discontent. Note, Even those that are espoused to God may yet seem to be refused and forsaken, and may be grieved in spirit under the apprehensions of being so. Those that shall never be forsaken and left in despair may yet for a time be perplexed and in distress. The similitude is explained (v. 7, 8): *For a small moment have I forsaken thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee.* When God continues his people long in trouble he seems to forsake them; so their enemies construe it (Ps. lxxi. 11); so they themselves misinterpret it, *ch. xlix. 14*. When they are comfortless under their troubles, because their prayers and expectations are not answered, God hides his face from them, as if he regarded them not nor designed them any kindness. God owns that he had done this; for he keeps an account of the afflictions of his people, and, though he never turned his face against them (as against the wicked, Ps. xxxiv. 16), he remembers how often he turned his back upon them. This arose indeed from his displeasure. It was in wrath that he forsook them and hid his face from them (*ch. lvii. 17*); yet it was but in a little wrath: not that God's wrath ever is a little thing, or to be made light of (*Who knows the power of his anger?*), but little in comparison with what they had deserved, and what others justly suffer, on whom the full vials of his wrath are poured out. He did not stir up all his wrath. But God's people, though they be sensible of ever so small a degree of God's displeasure, cannot but be grieved in spirit because of it. As for the continuance of it, it was but *for a moment*, a *small moment*; for God does not keep his anger against his people for ever; no, it is soon over. As he is slow to anger, so he is swift to show mercy. The afflictions of God's people, as they are light, so they are but for a moment, a cloud that presently blows over. 2. How sweet the returns of mercy would be to them when God should come and comfort them according to the time that he had afflicted them. God called them into covenant with himself when they were forsaken and grieved; he called them out of their afflictions when they were most pressing, v. 6. God's anger endures for a moment, but he will gather

his people when they think themselves neglected, will gather them out of their dispersions, that they may return in a body to their own land,—will gather them into his arms, to protect them, embrace them, and bear them up,—and will gather them at last to himself, *will gather the wheat into the barn*. He will have mercy on them. This supposes the turning away of his anger and the admitting of them again into his favour. God's gathering his people takes rise from his mercy, not any merit of theirs; and it is with *great mercies* (v. 7), *with everlasting kindness*, v. 8. The wrath is little, but the mercies are great; the wrath is for a moment, but the kindness everlasting. See how one is set over against the other, that we may neither despond under our afflictions nor despair of relief.

II. Look forward to future dangers, and in defiance of them God's favours to his people appear very constant, and his kindness everlasting; for it is formed into a covenant, here called a *covenant of peace*, because it is founded in reconciliation and is inclusive of all good. Now,

1. This is as firm as the covenant of providence. It is *as the waters of Noah*, that is, as that promise which was made concerning the deluge that there should never be the like again to disturb the course of summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, v. 9. God then contended with the world in great wrath, and for a full year, and yet at length returned in mercy, everlasting mercy; for he gave his word, which was as inviolable as his oath, that Noah's flood should never return, that he would never drown the world again; see Gen. viii. 21, 22; ix. 11. And God has ever since kept his word, though the world has been very provoking; and he will keep it to the end; for the world that now is is reserved unto fire. And thus inviolable is the covenant of grace: *I have sworn that I would not be wroth with thee*, as I have been, *and rebuke thee*, as I have done. He will not be so angry with them as to cast them off and break his covenant with them (Ps. lxxxix. 34), nor rebuke them as he has rebuked the heathen, to destroy them, and *put out their name for ever and ever*, Ps. ix. 5.

2. It is more firm than the strongest parts of the visible creation (v. 10): *The mountains shall depart*, which are called *everlasting mountains*, and *the hills be removed*, though they are called *perpetual hills*, Hab. iii. 6. Sooner shall they remove than God's covenant with his people be broken. Mountains have sometimes been shaken by earthquakes, and removed; but the promises of God were never broken by the shock of any event. The day will come when *all the mountains shall depart* and *all the hills be removed*, not only the tops of them covered, as they were by the waters of Noah, but the roots of them torn up; for the earth and all the

works that are therein shall be burned up; but then the covenant of peace between God and believers shall continue in the everlasting bliss of all those who are the children of that covenant. Mountains and hills signify great men, men of bulk and figure. Do these mountains seem to support the skies (as Atlas) and bear them up? They shall depart and be removed. Creature-confidences shall fail us. *In vain is salvation hoped for from those hills and mountains*. But the firmament is firm, and answers to its name, when those who seem to prop it are gone. When our friends fail us our God does not, nor does his kindness depart? Do these mountains threaten, and seem to top the skies, and bid defiance to them, as Pelion and Ossa? Do the kings of the earth, and the rulers, set themselves against the Lord? They shall depart and be removed. Great mountains, that stand in the way of the salvation of the church, shall be *made plain* (Zech. iv. 7); but God's kindness shall never depart from his people, for whom he loves he loves to the end; nor shall the covenant of his peace ever be removed, for he is the Lord that has mercy on his people. *Therefore* the covenant is immovable and inviolable, because it is built not on our merit, which is a mutable uncertain thing, but on God's mercy, which is from everlasting to everlasting.

11 O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, *and* not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. 12 And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones. 13 And all thy children *shall be* taught of the LORD; and great *shall be* the peace of thy children. 14 In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression; for thou shalt not fear: and from terror; for it shall not come near thee. 15 Behold, they shall surely gather together, *but* not by me: whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall for thy sake. 16 Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire, and that bringeth forth an instrument for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy. 17 No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue *that* shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This *is* the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness *is* of me, saith the LORD.



Very precious promises are here made to the church in her low condition, that God would not only continue his love to his people under their troubles as before, but that he would restore them to their former prosperity, nay, that he would raise them to greater prosperity than any they had yet enjoyed. In the foregoing chapter we had the humiliation and exaltation of Christ; here we have the humiliation and exaltation of the church; for, if we suffer with him, we shall reign with him. Observe,

I. The distressed state the church is here reduced to by the providence of God (v. 11): "*O thou afflicted, poor, and indigent society, that art tossed with tempests*, like a ship driven from her anchors by a storm and hurried into the ocean, where she is ready to be swallowed up by the waves, and in this condition *not comforted* by any compassionate friend that will sympathize with thee, or suggest to thee any encouraging considerations (Eccl. iv. 1), not comforted by any ally to thy trouble, or prospect of deliverance out of it." This was the condition of the Jews in Babylon, and afterwards, for a time, under Antiochus. It is often the condition of Christian churches and of particular believers; without are fightings, within are fears; they are like the disciples in a storm, ready to perish; and where is their faith?

II. The glorious state the church is here advanced to by the promise of God. God takes notice of the afflicted distressed state of his church, and comforts her, when she is most disconsolate and has no other comforter. Let the people of God, when they are afflicted and tossed, think they hear God speaking comfortably to them by these words, taking notice of their griefs and fears, what afflictions they are under, what distresses they are in, and what comforts their case calls for. When they bemoan themselves, God bemoans them, and speaks to them with pity: *O thou afflicted, tossed with tempests, and not comforted*; for in all their afflictions he is afflicted. But this is not all; he engages to raise her up out of her affliction, and encourages her with the assurance of the great things he would do for her, both for her prosperity and for the securing of that prosperity to her.

1. Whereas now she lay in disgrace, God promises that which would be her beauty and honour, which would make her easy to herself and amiable in the eyes of others.

(1.) This is here promised by a similitude taken from a city, and it is an apt similitude, for the church is the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. Whereas now Jerusalem lay in ruins, a heap of rubbish, it shall be not only rebuilt, but beautified, and appear more splendid than ever; the stones shall be laid not only firm, but fine, laid with fair colours; they shall be *glistening stones*, 1 Chron. xxix. 2. The foundations

shall be laid or garnished with *sapphires*, the most precious of the precious stones here mentioned; for Christ (the church's foundation), and the foundation of the apostles and prophets, are precious above any thing else. The windows of this house, city, or temple, shall be made of *agates*, the gates of *carbuncles*, and all the *borders* (the walls that enclose the courts, or the boundaries by which her limits are marked, the mere-stones) shall be of *pleasant stones*, v. 12. Never was this literally true; but it intimates, [1.] That, God having graciously undertaken to build his church, we may expect that to be done for it, that to be wrought in it, which is very great and uncommon. [2.] That the glory of the New-Testament church shall far exceed that of the Jewish church, not in external pomp and splendour, but in those gifts and graces of the Spirit which are infinitely more valuable, that wisdom which is *more precious than rubies* (Prov. iii. 15), than the precious onyx and the sapphire, and which the *topaz of Ethiopia cannot equal*, Job xxviii. 16, 19. [3.] That the wealth of this world, and those things of it that are accounted most precious, shall be despised by all the true living members of the church, as having no value, no glory, in comparison with that which far excels. That which the children of this world lay up among their treasures, and too often in their hearts, the children of God make pavements of, and put under their feet, the fittest place of it.

(2.) It is here promised in the particular instances of those things that shall be the beauty and honour of the church, which are knowledge, holiness, and love, the very image of God, in which man was created, renewed, and restored. And these are the sapphires and carbuncles, the precious and pleasant stones, with which the gospel temple shall be enriched and beautified, and these wrought by the power and efficacy of those doctrines which the apostle compares to gold, silver, and precious stones, that are to be *built upon the foundation*, 1 Cor. iii. 12. Then the church is all glorious, [1.] When it is full of the knowledge of God, and that is promised here (v. 13): *All thy children shall be taught of the Lord*. The church's children, being born of God, shall be taught of God; being his children by adoption, he will take care of their education. It was promised (v. 1) that the church's children should be many; but lest we should think that being many, as sometimes it happens in numerous families, they will be neglected, and not have instruction given them so carefully as if they were but few, God here takes that work into his own hand: *They shall all be taught of the Lord*; and none teaches like him. *First*, It is a promise of the means of instruction and those means authorized by a divine institution: *They shall all be taught of God*, that is, they shall be taught by those whom God shall appoint and whose labours shall

be under his direction and blessing. He will ordain the methods of instruction, and by his word and ordinances will diffuse a much greater light than the Old-Testament church had. Care shall be taken for the teaching of the church's children, that knowledge may be transmitted from generation to generation, and that all may be enriched with it, from the least even to the greatest. *Secondly*, It is a promise of the Spirit of illumination. Our Saviour quotes it with application to gospel grace, and makes it to have its accomplishment in all those that were brought to believe in him (John vi. 45): *It is written in the prophets, They shall be all taught of God*, whence he infers that those, and those only, come to him by faith that have heard and learned of the Father, that are *taught by him as the truth is in Jesus*, Eph. iv. 21. There shall be a plentiful effusion of the Spirit of grace upon Christians, to *teach them all things*, John xiv. 26. [2.] When the members of it live in love and unity among themselves: *Great shall be the peace of thy children*. Peace may be taken here for all good. As where no knowledge of God is no good can be expected, so those that are taught of God to know him are in a fair way to prosper for both worlds. *Great peace have those that know and love God's law*, Ps. cxix. 165. But it is often put for love and unity; and so we may take it. All that are taught of God are taught to *love one another* (1 Thess. iv. 9) and that will keep peace among the church's children and prevent their falling out by the way. [3.] When holiness reigns; for that above any thing is the beauty of the church (v. 14): *In righteousness shalt thou be established*. The reformation of manners, the restoration of purity, the due administration of public justice, and the prevailing of honesty and fair dealing among men, are the strength and stability of any church or state. The kingdom of God, set up by the gospel of Christ, is not meat and drink, but this righteousness and peace, holiness and love.

2. Whereas now she lay in danger, God promises that which would be her protection and security.

(1.) God engages here that though, in the day of her distress, without were fightings and within were fears, now she shall be safe from both. [1.] There shall be no fears within (v. 14): *"Thou shalt be far from oppression"*. Those that have oppressed thee shall be removed, those that would oppress thee shall be restrained, and therefore thou shalt not fear, but mayest look upon it as a thing at a great distance, that thou art now in no danger of. Thou shalt be far from terror, not only from evil, but from the fear of evil, for it shall not come near thee so as to do thee any hurt or to put thee in any fright." Note, Those are far from terror that are far from oppression; for it is as great a terror as can fall on a peo-

ple to have the rod of government turned into the serpent of oppression, because against this there is no fence, nor is there any flight from it. [2.] There shall be no fightings without. Though attempts should be made upon them to insult them, to invade their country, or besiege their towns, they should all be in vain, and none of them succeed, v. 15. It is granted, *"They shall surely gather together against thee; thou must expect it."* The confederate force of hell and earth will be renewing their assaults. As long as there is a devil in hell, and a persecutor out of it, God's people must expect frequent alarms; but, *First*, God will not own them, will not give them either commission or countenance; they gather together, hand joins in hand, but it is *not by me*. God gave them no such order as he did to Sennacherib, to *take the spoil, and to take the prey*, ch. x. 6. And therefore, *Secondly*, Their attempt will end in their own ruin: *"Whosoever shall gather together against thee, be they ever so many and ever so mighty, they shall not only be baffled, but they shall fall for thy sake, or they shall fall before thee, which shall be the just punishment of their enmity to thee."* God will make them to fall for the sake of the love he bears to his church and the care he has of it, in answer to the prayers made by his people, and in pursuance of the promises made to them. *"They shall fall, that thou mayest stand,"* Ps. xxvii. 2.

(2.) That we may with the greatest assurance depend upon God for the safety of his church, we have here, [1.] The power of God over the church's enemies asserted, v. 16. The truth is they have *no power but what is given them from above*, and he that gave them their power can limit and restrain them. *Hitherto they shall go, and no further*. *First*, They cannot carry on their design without arms and weapons of war; and the smith that makes those weapons is God's creature, and he gave him his skill to work in iron and brass (Exod. xxxi. 3, 4) and particularly to make proper instruments for warlike purposes. It is melancholy to think, as if men did not die fast enough of themselves, how ingenious and industrious they are to make instruments of death and to find out ways and means to kill one another. *The smith blows the coals in the fire*, to make his iron malleable, to soften it first, that it may be hardened into steel, and so he may bring forth an instrument proper for the work of those that seek to destroy. It is the iron age that is the age of war. But *God has created the smith*, and therefore can tie his hands, so that the project of the enemy shall miscarry (as many a project has done) for want of arms and ammunition. Or the smith that forges the weapons is perhaps put here for the council of war that forms the design, blows the coals of contention, and brings forth the plan of the war; these can do no more than God will let them.



*Secondly*, They cannot carry it on without men, they must have soldiers, and it is *God that created the waster to destroy*. Military men value themselves upon their great offices and splendid titles, and even the common soldiers call themselves *gentlemen*; but God calls them *wasters made to destroy*, for wasting and destruction are their business. They think their own ingenuity, labour, and experience, made them soldiers; but it was God that created them, and gave them strength and spirit for that hazardous employment; and therefore he not only can restrain them, but will serve his own purposes and designs by them. [2.] The promise of God concerning the church's safety solemnly laid down, as *the heritage of the servants of the Lord* (v. 17), as that which they may depend upon and be confident of, that God will protect them from their adversaries both in camps and courts. *First*, From their field-adversaries, that think to destroy them by force and violence, and dint of sword: "*No weapon that is formed against thee* (though ever so artfully formed by the smith that blows the coals, v. 16, though ever so skillfully managed by the waster that seeks to destroy) *shall prosper*; it shall not prove strong enough to do any harm to the people of God; it shall miss its mark, shall fall out of the hand or perhaps recoil in the face of him that uses it against thee." It is the happiness of the church that *no weapon formed against it shall prosper* long, and therefore the folly of its enemies will at length be made manifest to all, for they are but preparing instruments of ruin for themselves. *Secondly*, From their law-adversaries, that think to run them down under colour of right and justice. When the weapons of war do not prosper there are tongues that rise in judgment. Both are included in the gates of hell, that seek to destroy the church: for they had their courts of justice, as well as their magazines and military stores, in their gates. The tongues that rise in judgment against the church are such as either demand a dominion over it, as if God's children were their lawful captives, pretending an authority to oppress their consciences, or they are such as misrepresent them, and falsely accuse them, and by slanders and calumnies endeavour to make them odious to the people and obnoxious to the government. This the enemies of the Jews did, to incense the kings of Persia against them, Ezra iv. 12; Esth. iii. 8. "But these insulting threatening tongues thou shalt condemn; thou shalt have wherewith to answer their insolent demands, and to put to silence their malicious reflections. Thou shalt do it *by well-doing* (1 Pet. ii. 15), by doing that which will make thee manifest in the consciences even of thy adversaries, that thou art not what thou art represented to be. *Thou shalt condemn them*, that is, God shall condemn them for thee. *He shall bring forth thy right-*

*eousness as the light*, Ps. xxxvii. 6. Thou shalt condemn them as Noah condemned the old world that reproached him, by building the ark, and so saving his house, in contempt of their contempts." The day is coming when God will reckon with wicked men for all their hard speeches which they have spoken against him, Jude 15.

The last words refer not only to this promise, but to all that go before: *This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord*. God's servants are his sons, for he has provided an inheritance for them, rich, sure, and indefeasible. God's promises are their *heritage for ever* (Ps. cxix. 111); and their *righteousness is of me, saith the Lord*. God will clear up the righteousness of their cause before men. It is with him, for he knows it; it is with him, for he will plead it. Or their reward for their righteousness, and for all that which they have suffered unrighteously, is of God, that God who judges in the earth, and with whom *verily there is a reward for the righteous*. Or their righteousness itself, all that in them which is good and right, is of God, who works it in them; it is of Christ who is made righteousness to them. In those for whom God designus a heritage hereafter he will work righteousness now.

## CHAP. LV.

As we had much of Christ in the 53rd chapter, and much of the church of Christ in the 54th chapter, so in this chapter we have much of the covenant of grace made with us in Christ. The "sure mercies of David," which are promised here (ver. 3), are applied by the apostle to the benefits which flow to us from the resurrection of Christ (Acts xiii. 34), which may serve as a key to this chapter; not but that it was intended for the comfort of the people of God that lived then, especially of the captives in Babylon, and others of the dispersed of Israel; but unto us was this gospel preached as well as unto them, and much more clearly and fully in the New Testament. Here is, I. A free and gracious invitation to all to come and take the benefit of gospel grace, ver. 1. II. Pressing arguments to enforce this invitation, ver. 2-4. III. A promise of the success of this invitation among the Gentiles, ver. 5. IV. An exhortation to repentance and reformation, with great encouragement given to hope for pardon thereupon, ver. 6-8. V. The ratification of all this, with the certain efficacy of the word of God, ver. 10, 11. And a particular instance of the accomplishment of it in the return of the Jews out of their captivity, which was intended for a sign of the accomplishment of all these other promises.

**H**O, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. 2 Wherefore do ye spend money for *that which is* not bread? and your labour for *that which* satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye *that which is* good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. 3 Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, *even* the sure mercies of David. 4 Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people. 5

Behold, thou shalt call a nation *that* thou knowest not, and nations *that* knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the LORD thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee.

Here, I. We are all invited to come and take the benefit of that provision which the grace of God has made for poor souls in the new covenant, of that which is the *heritage of the servants of the Lord* (ch. liv. 17), and not only their heritage hereafter, but their cup now, v. 1. Observe,

1. Who are invited: *Ho, every one*. Not the Jews only, to whom first the word of salvation was sent, but the Gentiles, the poor and the maimed, the halt and the blind, are called to this marriage supper, whoever can be picked up out of the highways and the hedges. It intimates that in Christ there is enough for all and enough for each, that ministers are to make a general offer of life and salvation to all, that in gospel times the invitation should be more largely made than it had been and should be sent to the Gentiles, and that the gospel covenant excludes none that do not exclude themselves. The invitation is published with an *Oyez*—*Ho*, take notice of it. *He that has ears to hear let him hear*.

2. What is the qualification required in those that shall be welcome—they must thirst. All shall be welcome to gospel grace upon those terms only that gospel grace be welcome to them. Those that are satisfied with the world and its enjoyments for a portion, and seek not for a happiness in the favour of God,—those that depend upon the merit of their own works for a righteousness, and see no need they have of Christ and his righteousness,—these do not thirst; they have no sense of their need, are in no pain or uneasiness about their souls, and therefore will not condescend so far as to be beholden to Christ. But those that thirst are invited to the waters, as those that labour, and are heavy-laden, are invited to Christ for rest. Note, Where God gives grace he first gives a thirsting after it; and, where he has given a thirsting after it, he will give it, Ps. lxxxi. 10.

3. Whither they are invited: *Come you to the waters*. Come to the water-side, to the ports, and quays, and wharfs, on the navigable rivers, into which goods are imported; thither come and buy, for that is the marketplace of foreign commodities; and to us they would have been for ever foreign if Christ had not brought in an everlasting righteousness. Come to Christ; for he is the fountain opened; he is the rock smitten. Come to holy ordinances, to those streams that make glad the city of our God; come to them, and though they may seem to you plain and common things, like waters, yet to those who believe in Christ the things

signified will be as wine and milk, abundantly refreshing. Come to the healing waters; come to the living waters. Whoever will, let him come, and *partake of the waters of life*, Rev. xxii. 17. Our Saviour referred to it, John vii. 37. *If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink*.

4. What they are invited to do. (1.) *Come, and buy*. Never did any tradesman court customers that he hoped to get by as Christ courts us to that which we only are to be the gainers by. “Come and buy, and we can assure you you shall have a good bargain, which you will never repent of nor lose by. Come and buy; make it your own by an application of the grace of the gospel to yourselves; make it your own upon Christ’s terms, nay, your own upon any terms, and stand not hesitating about the terms, nor deliberating whether you shall agree to them.” (2.) “*Come, and eat*; make it still more your own, as that which we eat is more our own than that which we only buy.” We must buy the truth, not that we may lay it by to be looked at, but that we may feed and feast upon it, and that the spiritual life may be nourished and strengthened by it. We must buy necessary provisions for our souls, be willing to part with any thing, though ever so dear to us, so that we may but have Christ and his graces and comforts. We must part with sin, because it is an opposition to Christ, part with all opinion of our own righteousness, as standing in competition with Christ, and part with life itself, and its most necessary supports, rather than quit our interest in Christ. And, when we have bought what we need, let us not deny ourselves the comfortable use of it, but enjoy it, and eat the labour of our hands: *Buy, and eat*.

5. What is the provision they are invited to: “*Come, and buy wine and milk*, which will not only quench the thirst” (fair water would do that), “but nourish the body, and revive the spirits.” The world comes short of our expectations. We promise ourselves, at least, water in it, but we are disappointed of that, as *the troops of Tema*, Job vi. 19. But Christ outdoes our expectations. We come to the waters, and would be glad of them, but we find there wine and milk, which were the staple commodities of the tribe of Judah, and which the Shiloh of that tribe is furnished with to entertain the *gathering of the people to him*, Gen. xlix. 10, 12. *His eyes shall be red with wine and his teeth white with milk*. We must come to Christ, to have milk for babes, to nourish and cherish those that are but lately born again; and with him strong men shall find that which will be a cordial to them: they shall have wine to make glad their hearts. We must part with our puddle-water, nay, with our poison, that we may procure this wine and milk.

6. The free communication of this provision: *Buy it without money, and without price*.



A strange way of buying, not only without ready money (that is common enough), but without any money, or the promise of any; yet it seems not so strange to those who have observed Christ's counsel to Laodicea, that was wretchedly poor, to *come and buy*, Rev. iii. 17, 18. Our buying without money intimates, (1.) That the gifts offered us are invaluable and such as no price can be set upon. Wisdom is that which cannot be gotten for gold. (2.) That he who offers them has no need of us, nor of any returns we can make him. He makes us these proposals, not because he has occasion to sell, but because he has a disposition to give. (3.) That the things offered are already bought and paid for. Christ purchased them at the full value, with price, not with money, but with *his own blood*, 1 Pet. i. 19. (4.) That we shall be welcome to the benefits of the promise, though we are utterly unworthy of them, and cannot make a tender of any thing that looks like a valuable consideration. We ourselves are not of any value, nor is any thing we have or can do, and we must own it, that, if Christ and heaven be ours, we may see ourselves for ever indebted to free grace.

II. We are earnestly pressed and persuaded (and O that we would be prevailed with!) to accept this invitation, and make this good bargain for ourselves.

1. That which we are persuaded to is to hearken to God and to his proposals: "*Hearken diligently unto me*, v. 2. Not only give me the hearing, but approve of what I say, and apply it to yourselves (v. 3): *Incline your ear*, as you do to that which you find yourselves concerned in and pleased with; bow the ear, and let the proud heart stoop to the humbling methods of the gospel; bend the ear this way, that you may hear with attention and remark; hear, *and come unto me*; not only come and treat with me, but comply with me, come up to my terms;" accept God's offers as very advantageous; answer his demands as very fit and reasonable.

2. The arguments used to persuade us to this are taken,

(1.) From the unspeakable wrong we do to ourselves if we neglect and refuse this invitation: "*Wherefore do you spend money for that which is not bread*, which will not yield you, no, not beggar's food, dry bread, when with me you may have wine and milk without money? *Wherefore do you spend your labour and toil for that which will not be so much as dry bread to you, for it satisfies not?*" See here, [1.] The vanity of the things of this world. They are not bread, not proper food for a soul; they afford no suitable nourishment or refreshment. Bread is the staff of the natural life, but it affords no support at all to the spiritual life. All the wealth and pleasure in the world will not make one meal's meat for a soul. Eternal truth and eternal good are the only food

for a rational and immortal soul, the life of which consists in reconciliation and conformity to God, and in union and communion with him, which the things of the world will not at all befriending. *They satisfy not*; they yield not any solid comfort and content to the soul, nor enable it to say, "Now I have what I would have." Nay, they do not satisfy even the appetites of the body. The more men have the more they would have, Eccl. i. 8. Haman was unsatisfied in the midst of his abundance. They flatter, but they do not fill; they please for a while, like the dream of a hungry man, who awakes and his soul is empty. They cloy a man, but do not content him, or make him truly easy. It is all vanity and vexation. [2.] The folly of the children of this world. They spend their money and labour for these uncertain unsatisfying things. Rich people live by their money, poor people by their labour; but both mistake their truest interest, while the one is trading, the other toiling, for the world, both promising themselves satisfaction and happiness in it, but both miserably disappointed. God vouchsafes compassionately to reason with them: "Wherefore do you thus act against your own interest? Why do you suffer yourselves to be thus imposed upon?" Let us reason thus with ourselves, and let the result of these reasonings be a holy resolution not to labour for the meat that perishes, but for that which endures to everlasting life, John vi. 27. Let all the disappointments we meet with in the world help to drive us to Christ, and lead us to seek for satisfaction in him only. This is the way to make that sure which will be made sure.

(2.) From the unspeakable kindness we do to ourselves if we accept this invitation and comply with it. [1.] Hereby we secure to ourselves present pleasure and satisfaction: "If you hearken to Christ, you eat that which is good, which is both wholesome and pleasant, good in itself and good for you." God's good word and promise, a good conscience, and the comforts of God's good Spirit, are a continual feast to those that hearken diligently and obediently to Christ. Their souls shall *delight themselves in fatness*, that is, in the richest and most grateful delights. Here the invitation is not, "*Come, and buy*," lest that should discourage, but, "*Come, and eat*; come and entertain yourselves with that which will be abundantly pleasing; eat, O friends!" It is sad to think that men should need to be courted thus to their own bliss. [2.] Hereby we secure to ourselves lasting happiness: "*Hear, and your soul shall live*; you shall not only be saved from perishing eternally, but you shall be eternally blessed:" for less than that cannot be the life of an immortal soul. The words of Christ are spirit and life, life to spirits (John vi. 33, 63), the words

of this life, Acts v. 20. On what easy terms is happiness offered to us! It is but "Hear, and you shall live." [3.] The great God graciously secures all this to us: "Come to me, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, will put myself into covenant-relations and under covenant-engagements to you, and thereby settle upon you the sure mercies of David." Note, *First*, If we come to God to serve him, he will covenant with us to do us good and make us happy; such are his condescension to us and concern for us. *Secondly*, God's covenant with us is an everlasting covenant—its contrivance from everlasting, its continuance to everlasting. *Thirdly*, The benefits of this covenant are mercies suited to our case, who, being miserable, are the proper objects of mercy. They come from God's mercy, and are ordered every way in kindness to us. *Fourthly*, They are the mercies of David, such mercies as God promised to David (Ps. lxxxix. 28, 29, &c.), which are called *the mercies of David his servant*, and are appealed to by Solomon, 2 Chron. vi. 42. It shall be a covenant as sure as that with David, Jer. xxxiii. 25, 26. The covenant of royalty was a figure of the covenant of grace, 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. Or, rather, by David here we are to understand the Messiah. Covenant-mercies are all *his* mercies; they are purchased by him; they are promised in him; they are treasured up in his hand, and out of his hand they are dispensed to us. He is the Mediator and trustee of the covenant; to him this is applied, Acts xiii. 34. They are the *τὰ ὅσια* (the word used there, and by the LXX. here)—*the holy things of David*, for they are confirmed by the holiness of God (Ps. lxxxix. 35) and are intended to advance holiness among men. *Fifthly*, They are sure mercies. The covenant, being well-ordered in all things, is sure. It is sure in the general proposal of it; God is real and sincere, serious and in earnest, in the offer of these mercies. It is sure in the particular application of it to believers; God's gifts and callings are without repentance. They are the mercies of David, and therefore sure, for in Christ the promises are all yea and amen.

III. Jesus Christ is promised for the making good of all the other promises which we are here invited to accept of, v. 4. He is that David whose sure mercies all the blessings and benefits of the covenant are. "And God has given him in his purpose and promise, has constituted and appointed him, and in the fulness of time will as surely send him as if he had already come, to be all that to us which is necessary to our having the benefit of these preparations." He has given him freely; for what more free than a gift? There was nothing in us to merit such a favour, but Christ is the gift of God. We want one, 1. To attest the truth of the promises which we are invited to take the benefit of; and Christ is given *for a witness*

that God is willing to receive us into his favour upon gospel terms, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers, that we may venture our souls upon those promises with entire satisfaction. Christ is a faithful witness, we may take his word—a competent witness, for he lay in the bosom of the Father from eternity, and was perfectly apprised of the whole matter. Christ, as a prophet, testifies the will of God to the world; and to believe is to receive his testimony. 2. To assist us in closing with the invitation, and coming up to the terms of it. We know not how to find the way to the waters where we are to be supplied, but Christ is given to be a *leader*. We know not what to do that we may be qualified for it, and become sharers in it, but he is given for a *commander*, to show us what to do and enable us to do it. Much difficulty and opposition lie in our way to Christ; we have spiritual enemies to grapple with, but, to animate us for the conflict, we have a good captain, like Joshua, a leader and commander to tread our enemies under our feet and to put us in possession of the land of promise. Christ is a commander by his precept and a leader by his example; our business is to obey him and follow him.

IV. The Master of the feast being fixed, it is next to be furnished with guests, for the provision shall not be lost, nor made in vain, v. 5. 1. The Gentiles shall be called to this feast, shall be invited out of the highways and the hedges: "*Thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not*, that is, that was not formerly called and owned as thy nation, that thou didst not send prophets to as to Israel, the people whom God knew above all the families of the earth." The Gentiles shall now be favoured as they never were before; their knowing God is said to be rather their *being known of God*, Gal. iv. 9. 2. They shall come at the call: *Nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee*; those that had long been afar off from Christ shall be made nigh; those that had been running from him shall run to him, with the greatest speed and alacrity imaginable. There shall be a concourse of believing Gentiles to Christ, who, being lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to him. Now see the reason, (1.) Why the Gentiles will thus flock to Christ; it is *because of the Lord his God*, because he is the Son of God, and is declared to be so with power; because they now see his God is one with whom they have to do, and there is no coming to him as their God but by making an interest in his Son. Those that are brought to be acquainted with God, and understand how the concern lies between them and him, cannot but run to Jesus Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and man, and there is no coming to God but by him. (2.) Why God will bring them to him; it is because he is the Holy One of Israel, true to his promises,



and he has promised to glorify him by giving him the heathen for his inheritance. When Greeks began to enquire after Christ he said, *The hour has come that the Son of man should be glorified*, John xii. 22, 23. And his being glorified in his resurrection and ascension was the great argument by which multitudes were wrought upon to run to him.

6 Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: 7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. 8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. 9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. 10 For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: 11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. 12 For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. 13 Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

We have here a further account of that covenant of grace which is made with us in Jesus Christ, both what is required and what is promised in the covenant, and of those considerations that are sufficient abundantly to confirm our believing compliance with and reliance on that covenant. This gracious discovery of God's good-will to the children of men is not to be confined either to the Jew or to the Gentile, to the Old Testament or to the New, much less to the captives in Babylon. No, both the precepts and the promises are here given to all, to every one that thirsts after happiness, v. 1. And who does not? Hear this, and live.

1. Here is a gracious offer made of par-

don, and peace, and all happiness, to poor sinners, upon gospel terms, v. 6, 7.

1. Let them pray, and their prayers shall be heard and answered (v. 6): "*Seek the Lord while he may be found. Seek him whom you have left by revolting from your allegiance to him and whom you have lost by provoking him to withdraw his favour from you. Call upon him now while he is near, and within call.*" Observe here,

(1.) The duties required. [1.] "*Seek the Lord. Seek to him, and enquire of him, as your oracle. Ask the law at his mouth. What wilt thou have me to do? Seek for him, and enquire after him, as your portion and happiness; seek to be reconciled to him and acquainted with him, and to be happy in his favour. Be sorry that you have lost him; be solicitous to find him; take the appointed method of finding him, making use of Christ as your way, the Spirit as your guide, and the word as your rule.*" [2.] "*Call upon him. Pray to him, to be reconciled, and, being reconciled, pray to him for every thing else you have need of.*"

(2.) The motives made use of to press these duties upon us: *While he may be found—while he is near.* [1.] It is implied that now God is near and will be found, so that it shall not be in vain to seek him and to call upon him. Now his patience is waiting on us, his word is calling to us, and his Spirit striving with us. Let us now improve our advantages and opportunities; for now is the accepted time. But, [2.] There is a day coming when he will be afar off, and will not be found, when the day of his patience is over, and his Spirit will strive no more. There may come such a time in this life, when the heart is incurably hardened; it is certain that at death and judgment the door will be shut, Luke xvi. 26; xiii. 25, 26. Mercy is now offered, but then judgment without mercy will take place.

2. Let them repent and reform, and their sins shall be pardoned, v. 7. Here is a call to the unconverted, to the wicked and the unrighteous—to the wicked, who live in known gross sins, to the unrighteous, who live in the neglect of plain duties: to them is the word of this salvation sent, and all possible assurance given that penitent sinners shall find God a pardoning God. Observe here,

(1.) What it is to repent. There are two things involved in repentance:—[1.] It is to turn from sin; it is to forsake it. It is to leave it, and to leave it with loathing and abhorrence, never to return to it again. The wicked must *forsake his way*, his evil way, as we would forsake a false way that will never bring us to the happiness we aim at, and a dangerous way, that leads to destruction. Let him not take one step more in that way. Nay, there must be not only a change of the way, but a change of the mind; the unrighteous must *forsake his thoughts*. Repentance, if it be true, strikes at the root,

and washes the heart from wickedness. We must alter our judgments concerning persons and things, dislodge the corrupt imaginations and quit the vain pretences under which an unsanctified heart shelters itself. Note, It is not enough to break off from evil practices, but we must enter a caveat against evil thoughts. Yet this is not all: [2.] To repent is to *return to the Lord*; to return to him as our God, our sovereign Lord, against whom we have rebelled, and to whom we are concerned to reconcile ourselves; it is to return to the Lord as the fountain of life and living waters, which we had forsaken for broken cisterns.

{2.} What encouragement we have thus to repent. If we do so, [1.] *God will have mercy.* He will not deal with us as our sins have deserved, but will have compassion on us. Misery is the object of mercy. Now both the consequences of sin, by which we have become truly miserable (Ezek. xvi. 5, 6), and the nature of repentance, by which we are made sensible of our misery and are brought to bemoan ourselves (Jer. xxxi. 18), both these make us objects of pity, and with God there are tender mercies. [2.] *He will abundantly pardon.* He will multiply to pardon (so the word is), as we have multiplied to offend. Though our sins have been very great and very many, and though we have often backslidden and are still prone to offend, yet God will repeat his pardon, and welcome even backsliding children that return to him in sincerity.

II. Here are encouragements given us to accept this offer and to venture our souls upon it. For, look which way we will, we find enough to confirm us in our belief of its validity and value.

1. If we look up to heaven, we find God's counsels there high and transcendent, his thoughts and ways infinitely above ours, v. 8, 9. The wicked are urged to forsake their evil ways and thoughts (v. 7) and to return to God, that is, to bring their ways and thoughts to concur and comply with his; "for" (says he) "my thoughts and ways are not as yours. Yours are conversant only about things beneath; they are of the earth earthy: but mine are above, as the heaven is high above the earth; and, if you would approve yourselves true penitents, yours must be so too, and your affections must be set on things above." Or, rather, it is to be understood as an encouragement to us to depend upon God's promise to pardon sin, upon repentance. Sinners may be ready to fear that God will not be reconciled to them, because they could not find in their hearts to be reconciled to one who should have so basely and so frequently offended them. "But" (says God) "my thoughts in this matter are not as yours, but as far above them as heaven is above the earth." They are so in other things. Men's sentiments concerning sin, and Christ, and holiness,

concerning this world and the other, are vastly different from God's; but in nothing more than in the matter of reconciliation. We think God apt to take offence and backward to forgive—that, if he forgives once, he will not forgive a second time. Peter thought it a great deal to *forgive seven times* (Matt. xviii. 21), and a hundred pence go far with us; but God meets returning sinners with pardoning mercy; he forgives freely, and as he gives: it is without upbraiding. We forgive and cannot forget; but, when God forgives sin, he remembers it no more. Thus God invites sinners to return to him, by possessing them with good thoughts of him, as Jer. xxxi. 20.

2. If we look down to this earth, we find God's word there powerful and effectual, and answering all its great intentions, v. 10, 11. Observe here, (1.) The efficacy of God's word in the kingdom of nature. He saith to the snow, Be thou on the earth; he appoints when it shall come, to what degree, and how long it shall lie there; he saith so *to the small rain and the great rain of his strength*, Job xxxvii. 6. And according to his order they come down from heaven, and do *whatsoever he commands them upon the face of the world, whether it be for correction, or for his land, or for mercy*, v. 12, 13. It returns not *re infectâ*—without having accomplished its end, but waters the earth, which he is therefore said to do *from his chambers*, Ps. civ. 13. And the watering of the earth is in order to its fruitfulness. Thus he makes it to *bring forth and bud*, for the products of the earth depend upon the dews of heaven; and thus it gives not only *bread to the eater*, present maintenance to the owner and his family, but *seed* likewise *to the sower*, that he may have food for another year. The husbandman must be a sower as well as an eater, else he will soon see the end of what he has. (2.) The efficacy of his word in the kingdom of providence and grace, which is as certain as the former: "*So shall my word be*, as powerful in the mouth of prophets as it is in the hand of providence; *it shall not return unto me void*, as unable to effect what it was sent for, or meeting with an insuperable opposition; no, *it shall accomplish that which I please*" (for it is the declaration of his will, according to the counsel of which he works all things) "*and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.*" This assures us, [1.] That the promises of God shall all have their full accomplishment in due time, and not one iota or tittle of them shall fail, 1 Kings viii. 56. These promises of mercy and grace shall have as real an effect upon the souls of believers, for their sanctification and comfort, as ever the rain had upon the earth, to make it fruitful. [2.] That according to the different errands on which the word is sent it will have its different effects. If it be not a savour of life unto life, it will be a savour



of death unto death; if it do not convince the conscience and soften the heart, it will sear the conscience and harden the heart; if it do not ripen for heaven, it will ripen for hell. See *ch. vi. 9.* One way or other, it will take effect. [3.] That Christ's coming into the world, as the dew from heaven (*Hos. xiv. 5.*), will not be in vain. For, if Israel be not gathered, he will be glorious in the conversion of the Gentiles; to them therefore the tenders of grace must be made when the Jews refuse them, that the wedding may be furnished with guests and the gospel not return void.

3. If we take a special view of the church, we shall find what great things God has done, and will do, for it (*v. 12, 13*): *You shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace.* This refers, (1.) To the deliverance and return of the Jews out of Babylon. They shall go out of their captivity, and be led forth towards their own land again. God will go before them as surely, though not as sensibly, as before their fathers in the pillar of cloud and fire. They shall go out, not with trembling, but with triumph, not with any regret to part with Babylon, or any fear of being fetched back, but *with joy and peace.* Their journey home over the mountains shall be pleasant, and they shall have the good-will and good wishes of all the countries they pass through. *The hills and their inhabitants shall, as in a transport of joy, break forth into singing;* and, if the people should altogether hold their peace, even *the trees of the field* would attend them with their applauses and acclamations. And, when they come to their own land, it shall be ready to bid them welcome; for, whereas they expected to find it all overgrown with briars and thorns, it shall be set with *fir-trees and myrtle-trees:* for, though it lay desolate, yet it *enjoyed its sabbaths* (*Lev. xxvi. 34.*), which, when they were over, like the land after the sabbatical year, it was the better for. And this shall redound much to the honour of God and be to him *for a name.* But, (2.) Without doubt it looks further. This shall be *for an everlasting sign,* that is, [1.] The redemption of the Jews out of Babylon shall be a ratification of those promises that relate to gospel times. The accomplishment of the predictions relating to that great deliverance would be a pledge and earnest of the performance of all the other promises; for thereby it shall appear that *he is faithful who has promised.* [2.] It shall be a representation of the blessings promised and a type and figure of them. *First,* Gospel grace will set those at liberty that were in bondage to sin and Satan. *They shall go out and be led forth.* Christ shall make them free, and then they shall be free indeed. *Secondly,* It will fill those with joy that were melancholy. *Ps. xiv. 7, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad.* The earth and the inferior part of the creation shall

share in the joy of this salvation, *Ps. xcvi. 11.* 12. *Thirdly,* It will make a great change in men's characters. Those that were as thorns and briars, good for nothing but the fire, nay, hurtful and vexatious, shall become graceful and useful as the fir-tree and the myrtle-tree. Thorns and briars came in with sin and were the fruits of the curse, *Gen. iii. 18.* The raising of pleasant trees in the room of them signifies the removal of the curse of the law and the introduction of gospel blessings. The church's enemies were as thorns and briars; but, instead of them, God will raise up friends to be her protection and ornament. Or it may denote the world's growing better; instead of a generation of thorns and briars, there shall come up a generation of fir-trees and myrtles; the children shall be wiser and better than the parents. And, *fourthly,* in all this God shall be glorified. It shall be to him for a name, by which he will be made known and praised, and by it the people of God shall be encouraged. It shall be for an everlasting sign of God's favour to them, assuring them that, though it may for a time be clouded, it shall never be cut off. The covenant of grace is an everlasting covenant; for the present blessings of it are signs of everlasting ones.

## CHAP. LVI.

After the exceedingly great and precious promises of gospel grace, typified by temporal deliverances, which we had in the foregoing chapter, we have here, I. A solemn charge given to us all to make conscience of our duty, as we hope to have the benefit of those promises, *ver. 1, 2.* II. Great encouragement given to strangers that were willing to come under the bonds of the covenant, assuring them of the blessings of the covenant, *ver. 3-8.* III. A high charge drawn up against the watchmen of Israel, that were careless and unfaithful in the discharge of their duty (*ver. 9-12*), which seems to be the beginning of a new sermon, by way of reproof and threatening, which is continued in the following chapters. And the word of God was intended for conviction, as well as for comfort and instruction in righteousness.

THUS saith the LORD, Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed. 2 Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil.

The scope of these verses is to show that when God is coming towards us in a way of mercy we must go forth to meet him in a way of duty.

I. God here tells us what are his intentions of mercy to us (*v. 1*): *My salvation is near to come*—the great salvation wrought out by Jesus Christ (for that was the salvation of which the prophets enquired and searched diligently, *1 Pet. i. 10.*), typified by the salvation of the Jews from Sennacherib or out of Babylon. Observe, 1. The gospel salvation is the salvation of the Lord. It was contrived and brought about by him; he glories in it as his. 2. In that salvation God's righteousness is revealed, which is so much the beauty of the gospel that St. Paul makes this the

ground of his glorying in it. (Rom. i. 17), *because therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith.* The law revealed that righteousness of God by which all sinners stand condemned, but the gospel reveals that by which all believers stand acquitted. 3. The Old-Testament saints saw this salvation coming, and drawing near to them, long before it came; and they had notice by the prophets of its approach. As Daniel understood by Jeremiah's books the approach of the redemption out of Babylon, at the end of seventy years, so others understood by Daniel's books the approach of our redemption by Christ at the end of seventy weeks of years.

II. He tells us what are his expectations of duty from us, in consideration thereof. Say not, "We see the salvation near, and therefore we may live as we list, for there is no danger now of missing it or coming short of it;" that is turning the grace of God into wantonness. But, on the contrary, when the salvation is near double your guard against sin. Note, 'The fuller assurances God gives us of the performance of his promises the stronger obligations he lays us under to obedience. The salvation here spoken of has now come; yet, there being still a further salvation in view, the apostle presses duty upon us Christians with the same argument. Rom. xiii. 11, *Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.* That which is here required to qualify and prepare us for the approaching salvation is,

1. That we be honest and just in all our dealings: *Keep you judgment and do justice.* Walk by rule, and make conscience of what you say and do, that you do no wrong to any. Render to all their dues exactly, and, in exacting what is due to you, keep up a court of equity in your own bosom, to moderate the rigours of the law. Be ruled by that golden rule, "Do as you would be done by." Magistrates must administer justice wisely and faithfully. This is required to evidence the sincerity of our faith and repentance, and to open the way of mercy. *Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* God is true to us; let us be so to one another.

2. That we religiously observe the sabbath day, v. 2. We are not just if we rob God of his time. Sabbath-sanctification is here put for all the duties of the first table, the fruits of our love to God, as justice and judgment are put for all those of the second table, the fruits of our love to our neighbour. Observe, (1.) The duty required, which is to *keep the sabbath*, to keep it as a talent we are to trade with, as a treasure we are entrusted with. "Keep it holy; keep it safe; keep it with care and caution; keep it from polluting it. Allow neither yourselves nor others either to violate the holy rest or omit the holy work of that day." If this be intended primarily for the Jews in Babylon, it was fit that they should be particularly

put in mind of this, because when, by reason of their distance from the temple, they could not observe the other institutions of their law, yet they might distinguish themselves from the heathen by putting a difference between God's day and other days. But it being required more generally of man, and *the son of man*, it intimates that sabbath-sanctification should be a duty in gospel times, when the bounds of the church should be enlarged and other rites and ceremonies abolished. Observe, Those that would keep the sabbath from polluting it must put on resolution, must not only do this, but lay hold on it, for sabbath time is precious, but is very apt to slip away if we take not great care; and therefore we must lay hold on it and keep our hold, must do it and persevere in it. (2.) The encouragement we have to do this duty: *Blessed is he that doeth it.* The way to have the blessing of God upon our employments all the week is to make conscience, and make a business, of sabbath-sanctification; and in doing so we shall be the better qualified to do judgment and justice. The more godliness the more honesty, 1 Tim. ii. 2.

3. That we have nothing to do with sin *Blessed is the man that keeps his hand from doing evil*, any wrong to his neighbour, in body, goods, or good name—or, more generally, any thing that is displeasing to God and hurtful to his own soul. Note, The best evidence of our having kept the sabbath well will be a care to keep a good conscience all the week. By this it will appear that we have been in the mount with God if our faces shine in a holy conversation before men.

3 Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree. 4 For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose *the things* that please me, and take hold of my covenant; 5 Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off. 6 Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; 7 Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their



burnt-offerings and their sacrifices *shall be accepted upon mine altar*; for mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all people. 8 The LORD God which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather *others* to him, beside those that are gathered unto him.

The prophet is here, in God's name, encouraging those that were hearty in joining themselves to God and yet laboured under great discouragements. 1. Some were discouraged because they were not of the seed of Abraham. They had *joined themselves to the Lord*, had bound their souls with a bond to be his for ever (this is the root and life of religion, to break off from the world and the flesh, and devote ourselves entirely to the service and honour of God); but they questioned whether God would accept them, because they were of *the sons of the stranger*, v. 3. They were Gentiles, strangers to the commonwealth of Israel and aliens from the covenants of promise, and therefore feared they had no part nor lot in the matter. They said, "*The Lord has utterly separated me from his people*, and will not own me as one of them, nor admit me to their privileges." It was often said that there should be *one law for the stranger and for him that was born in the land* (Exod. xii. 49), and yet they came to this melancholy conclusion. Note, Unbelief often suggests things to the discouragement of good people which are directly contrary to what God himself has said, things which he has expressly guarded against. Let not the *sons of the stranger* therefore say thus, for they have no reason to say it. Note, Ministers must have answers ready for the disquieting fears and jealousies of weak Christians, which, how unreasonable soever, they must take notice of. 2. Others were discouraged because they were not fathers in Israel. The eunuch said, *Behold, I am a dry tree*. So he looked upon himself, and it was his grief; so others looked upon him, and it was his reproach. He was thought to be of no use because he had no children, nor was ever likely to have any. This was then the more grievous because eunuchs were not admitted to be priests (Lev. xxi. 20), nor to *enter into the congregation* (Deut. xxiii. 1), and because the promise of a numerous posterity was the particular blessing of Israel and the more valuable because from among them the Messiah was to come. Yet God would not have the eunuchs to make the worst of their case, nor to think that they should be excluded from the gospel church, and from being spiritual priests, because they were shut out from the congregation of Israel and the Levitical priesthood; no, as the taking down of the partition wall, contained in ordinances, admitted the Gentiles, so it let in likewise those that had been

kept out by ceremonial pollutions. Yet, by the reply here given to this suggestion, it should seem the chief thing which the eunuch laments in his case is his being written childless.

Now suitable encouragements are given to each of these.

1. To those who have no children of their own, who, though they had the honour to be the children of the church and the covenant themselves, yet had none to whom they might transmit that honour, none to receive the sign of circumcision and the privileges secured by that sign. Now observe,

1. What a good character they have, though they lie under this ignominy and affliction; and those only are entitled to the following comforts who in some measure answer to these characters. (1.) *They keep God's sabbaths* as he has appointed them to be kept. In the primitive times, if a Christian were asked, "Hast thou kept holy the Lord's day?" He would readily answer, "I am a Christian, and dare not do otherwise." (2.) In their whole conversation they *choose those things that please God*. They do that which is good; they do it with a sincere design to please God in it; they do it of choice, and with delight. If sometimes, through infirmity, they come short in doing that which pleases God, yet they choose it, they endeavour after it, and aim at it. Note, Whatever is God's pleasure should without dispute be our choice. (3.) *They take hold of his covenant*, and that is a thing that pleases God as much as any thing. The covenant of grace is proposed and proffered to us in the gospel; to take hold of it is to consent to it, to accept the offer and come up to the terms, deliberately and sincerely to take God to be to us a God and to give up ourselves to him to be to him a people. Taking hold of the covenant denotes an entire and resolute consent to it, taking hold as those that are afraid of coming short, catching at it as a good bargain, and as those that are resolved never to let it go, for it is our life: and we take hold of it as a criminal took hold of the horns of the altar to which he fled for refuge.

2. What a great deal of comfort they may have if they answer to this character, though they are not built up into families (v. 5): *Unto them will I give a better place and name*. It is supposed that there is a place and a name, which we have from sons and daughters, that is valuable and desirable. It is a pleasing notion we have that we live in our children when we are dead. But there is a better place, and a better name, which those have that are in covenant with God, and it is sufficient to counterbalance the want of the former. A place and a name denote rest and reputation; a place to live comfortably in themselves, and a name to live creditably with among their neighbours; they shall be happy, and may be easy both

at home and abroad. Though they have not children to be the music of their house, or arrows in their quiver, to keep them in countenance when they speak with their enemies in the gate, yet they shall have a place and a name more than equivalent. For, (1.) God will give it to them, will give it to them by promise; he will himself be both their habitation and their glory, their place and their name. (2.) He will give it to them in his house, and within his walls; there they shall have a place, shall be planted so as to take root (Ps. xcii. 13), shall dwell all the days of their life, Ps. xxvii. 4. They shall be at home in communion with God, as Anna, that departed not from the temple night nor day. There they shall have a name. A name for good things with God and good people is a name better than that of sons and daughters. Our relation to God, our interest in Christ, our title to the blessings of the covenant, and our hopes of eternal life, are things that give us in God's house a blessed place and a blessed name. (3.) It shall be an everlasting name, that shall never be extinct, shall never be cut off; like the place and name of angels, who therefore marry not, because they die not. Spiritual blessings are unspeakably better than those of sons and daughters; for children are a certain care and may prove the greatest grief and shame of a man's life, but the blessings we partake of in God's house are a sure and constant joy and honour, comforts which cannot be embittered.

II. To those that are themselves the children of strangers.

1. It is here promised that they shall now be welcome to the church, v. 6, 7. When God's Israel come out of Babylon, let them bring as many of their neighbours along with them as they can persuade to come, and God will find room enough for them all in his house. And here (as before) we may observe,

(1.) Upon what terms they shall be welcome. Let them know that God's Israel, when they come out of Babylon, will not be plagued, as they were when they came out of Egypt, with a mixed multitude, that went with them, but were not cordially for them; no, the sons of the strangers shall have a place and a name in God's house provided, [1.] That they forsake other gods, all rivals and pretenders whatsoever, and join themselves to the Lord, so as to become one spirit, 1 Cor. vi. 17. [2.] That they join themselves to him as subjects to their prince and soldiers to their general, by an oath of fidelity and obedience, to serve him, not occasionally, as one would serve a turn, but to be constantly his servants, entirely subject to his command, and devoted to his interest. [3.] That they join themselves to him as friends to his honour and the interests of his kingdom in the world, to love the name of the Lord, to be well pleased with all the discoveries he has made of himself and all

the memorials they make of him. Observe, Serving him and loving him go together; for those that love him truly will serve him faithfully, and that obedience is most acceptable to him, as well as most pleasant to us, which flows from a principle of love, for then his commandments are not grievous, 1 John v. 3. [4.] That they keep the sabbath from polluting it; for the stranger that is within thy gates is particularly required to do that. [5.] That they take hold of the covenant, that is, that they come under the bonds of it, and put in for the benefits of it.

(2.) To what privileges they shall be welcome, v. 7. Three things are here promised them, in their coming to God:—[1.] Assistance: "I will bring them to my holy mountain, not only bid them welcome when they come, but incline them to come, will show them the way, and lead them in it." David himself prays that God by his light and truth would bring them to his holy hill, Ps. xliii. 3. And the sons of the stranger shall be under the same guidance. The church is God's holy hill, on which he hath set his King, and, in bringing them to Zion Hill, he brings them to be subjects to Zion's King, as well as worshippers in Zion's holy temple. [2.] Acceptance: "Their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted on my altar, and be never the less acceptable for being theirs, though they are sons of the stranger." The prayers and praises (those spiritual sacrifices) of devout Gentiles shall be as pleasing to God as those of the pious Jews, and no difference shall be made between them; for, though they are Gentiles by birth, yet through grace they shall be looked upon as the believing seed of faithful Abraham and the praying seed of wrestling Jacob, for in Christ Jesus there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision. [3.] Comfort. They shall not only be accepted, but they themselves shall have the pleasure of it: I will make them joyful in my house of prayer. They shall have grace, not only to serve God, but to serve him cheerfully and with gladness, and that shall make the service the more acceptable to him; for, when we sing in the ways of the Lord, then great is the glory of our God. They shall go away and eat their bread with joy, because God now accepts their works, Eccl. ix. 7. Nay, though they came mourning to the house of prayer, they shall go away rejoicing, for they shall there find such ease, by casting their cares and burdens upon God, and referring themselves to him, that, like Hannah, they shall go away and their countenance shall be no more sad. Many a sorrowful spirit has been made joyful in the house of prayer.

2. It is here promised that multitudes of the Gentiles shall come to the church, not only that the few who come dropping in shall be made welcome, but that great numbers shall come in, and the door be thrown open



to them: *My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people.* The temple was then God's house, and to that Christ applies these words (Matt. xxi. 13), but with an eye to it as a type of the gospel church, Heb. ix. 8, 9. For Christ calls it *his house*, Heb. iii. 6. Now concerning this house it is promised, (1.) That it shall not be a house of sacrifice, but a house of prayer. The religious meetings of God's people shall be meetings for prayer, in which they shall join together, as a token of their united faith and mutual love. (2.) That it shall be a house of prayer, not for the people of the Jews only, but for all people. This was fulfilled when Peter was made, not only to perceive it himself, but to tell it to the world, that *in every nation he that fears God and works righteousness is accepted of him*, Acts x. 35. It had been declared again and again that *the stranger that comes nigh shall be put to death*, but Gentiles shall now be looked upon no longer as strangers and foreigners, Eph. ii. 19. And it appears by Solomon's prayer, at the dedication of the temple, both that it was primarily intended for a house of prayer and that strangers should be welcome to it, 1 Kings viii. 30, 41, 43. And it is intimated here (v. 8) that when the Gentiles are called in they shall be incorporated into one body with the Jews, that (as Christ says, John x. 16) there may be *one fold and one Shepherd*; for, [1.] God will *gather the outcasts of Israel*. Many of the Jews that had by their unbelief cast themselves out shall by faith be brought in again, *a remnant according to the election of grace*, Rom. xi. 5. Christ came to the *lost sheep of the house of Israel* (Matt. xv. 24), to *gather their outcasts* (Ps. cxlvii. 2), to *restore their preserved* (ch. xlix. 6), and to *be their glory*, Luke ii. 32. [2.] He will gather others also to him, besides his own outcasts that are gathered to him. Or, though some of the Gentiles have come over now and then into the church, that shall not serve (as some may think) to answer the extent of these promises; no, there are still more and more to be brought in: "*I will gather others to him besides these*"; these are but the first-fruits in comparison with the harvest that shall be gathered for Christ in the nations of the earth, when the fulness of the Gentiles shall come in." Note, The church is a growing body: when some are gathered to it we may still hope there shall be more, till the mystical body be completed. *Other sheep I have.*

9 All ye beasts of the field, come to devour, *yea*, all ye beasts in the forest. 10 His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. 11 *Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are*

shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter. 12 Come ye, *say they*, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to-morrow shall be as this day, *and much more abundant.*

From words of comfort the prophet here, by a very sudden change of his style, passes to words of reproof and conviction, and goes on in that strain, for the most part, in the three following chapters; and therefore some here begin a new sermon. He had assured the people that in due time God would deliver them out of captivity, which was designed for the comfort of those that should live when God would do this. Now here he shows what their sins and provocations were, for which God would send them into captivity, and this was designed for the conviction of those that lived in his own time, nearly a hundred years before the captivity, who were now filling up the measure of the nation's sin, and to justify God in what he brought upon them. God will lay them waste by the fierceness of their enemies, for the falseness of their friends.

I. Desolating judgments are here summoned, v. 9. The sheep of God's pasture are now to be made the sheep of his slaughter, to fall as victims to his justice, and therefore *the beasts of the field and the forest* are called to come and devour. They are beasts of prey, and do it from their own ravenous disposition; but God permits them to do it, nay, he employs them as his servants in doing it, the ministers of his justice, though they mean not so, neither does their heart think so. If this refers primarily to the descent made upon them by the Babylonians, and their devouring them, yet it may look further, to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation by the Romans, after these outcasts of them (mentioned v. 8) were gathered in to the Christian church. The Roman armies came upon them as beasts of the forest to devour them, and they quite *took away their place and nation*. Note, When God has bloody work to do he has beasts of prey within call, to be employed in doing it.

II. The reason of these judgments is here given. The shepherds, who should have been the watchmen of the flock, to discover the approaches of the beasts of prey, to keep them off, and protect the sheep, were treacherous and careless, minded not their business, nor made any conscience of the trust reposed in them, and so the sheep became an easy prey to the wild beasts. Now this may refer to the false prophets that lived in Isaiah's, Jeremiah's, and Ezekiel's time (who flattered the people in their wicked ways, and told them they should have peace though

they went on) and to the priests that bore rule by their means. Or it may refer to the wicked princes, the sons of Josiah, that *did evil in the sight of the Lord*, and other wicked magistrates under them, who betrayed their trust, were vicious and profane, and, instead of making up the breach at which the judgments of God were breaking in upon them, made it wider, and augmented the fierce anger of the Lord instead of doing any thing to turn it away. They should have kept judgment and justice (v. 1), but they abandoned both, Jer. v. 1. Or it may refer to those who were the nation's watchmen in our Saviour's time, the chief priests and the scribes, who should have discerned the signs of the times and have given notice to the people of the approach of the Messiah, but who, instead of that, opposed him, and did all they could to keep people from coming to the knowledge of him and to prejudice them against him. It is a very sad character that is here given of these watchmen. *Woe unto thee, O land!* when thy guides are such.

1. They had no sense or knowledge of their business. They were wretchedly ignorant of their work, and very unfit to teach, being so ill-taught themselves: *His watchmen are blind*, and therefore utterly unfit to be watchmen. If the seers see not, who shall see for us? *If the light that is in us be darkness, how great is that darkness!* Christ describes the Pharisees to be *blind leaders of the blind*, Matt. xv. 14. The beasts of the field come to devour, and the watchmen are blind, and are not aware of them. *They are all ignorant* (v. 10), *shepherds that cannot understand* (v. 11), that know not what is to be done about the sheep, nor can feed them with understanding, Jer. iii. 15. 2. What little knowledge they had they made no use of it; no one was the better for it. As they were blind watchmen, that could not discern the danger, so they were *dumb dogs*, that would not give warning of it. And why are the dogs set to guard the sheep if they cannot bark to waken the shepherd and frighten the wolf? Such were these; those that had the charge of souls never reproved men for their faults, nor told them what would be in the end thereof, never gave them notice of the judgments of God that were breaking in upon them. They barked at God's prophets, and bit them too, and worried the sheep, but made no opposition to the wolf or thief. 3. They were very lazy, and would take no pains. They loved their ease, and hated business, were always *sleeping, lying down and loving to slumber*. They were not overcome and overpowered by sleep, as the disciples, through grief and fatigue, but they lay down on purpose to invite sleep, and said, *Soul, take thy ease. Yet a little sleep*. It is bad with a people when their shepherds slumber (Nah. iii. 18), and it is well for God's people that their shepherd, the keeper of Israel, neither slumbers nor sleeps. 4.

They were very covetous and eager after the world—*greedy dogs that can never have enough*. If they had ever so much, they would think it too little. They so love silver as never to be satisfied with silver, Eccl. v. 10. All their enquiry is what they shall get, not what they shall do. Let them have the wages, and they care not whether the work be done or no; they feed not the flock, but fleece it. They are every one looking to his *own way*, minding his own private interests, and have no regard at all to the public welfare. It was St. Paul's complaint of the watchmen in his time (Phil. ii. 21), *All seek their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ's*. Every one is for propagating his own opinion, advancing his own party, raising his own family, and having every thing to his own mind, while the common concerns of the public are wretchedly neglected and postponed. They look *every one to his gain from his quarter*, from his end or part of the work. They are for gain from every quarter (*Rem, rem, quocunque modo rem—Money, money, by fair means or by foul we must have money*), but especially from their own quarter, where they will be sure to take care that they lose nothing, nor miss any thing that is to be got. If any one put not into their mouths they not only will do him no service, but they *prepare war against him*, Mic. iii. 5. 5. They were perfect epicures, given to their pleasures, never so much in their element as in their drunken revels (v. 12): *Come* (say they), *I will fetch wine* (they have that at command; their cellars are better furnished than their closets) and *we will fill ourselves*, or be drunk, *with strong drink*. They were often drunk, not overseen (as we say) or overtaken in drink, but designedly. The watchmen did thus invite and encourage one another to drink to excess, or they courted the people to sit and drink with them, and so confirmed those in their wicked ways, and hardened their hearts, whom they should have reproved. How could they think it any harm to be drunk when the watchmen themselves joined with them and led them to it! 6. They were very secure and confident of the continuance of their prosperity and ease; they said, *"To-morrow shall be as this day and much more abundant"*; we shall have as much to spend upon our lusts to-morrow as we have to-day." They had no thought at all of their own frailty and mortality, though they were shortening their days and hastening their deaths by their excesses. They had no dread of the judgments of God, though they were daily provoking him and making themselves liable to his wrath and curse. They never considered the uncertainty of all the delights and enjoyments of sense, how they perish in the using and pass away with the lusts of them. They resolved to continue in this wicked course, whatever their consciences said to the contrary, to be as merry to-morrow as they are to-day. *But boast*



*not thyself of to-morrow when perhaps this night thy soul shall be required of thee.*

## CHAP. LVII.

The prophet, in this chapter, makes his observations, I. Upon the deaths of good men, comforting those that were taken away in their integrity and reproving those that did not make a due improvement of such providences, ver. 1, 2. II. Upon the gross idolatries and spiritual whoredoms which the Jews were guilty of, and the destroying judgments they were thereby bringing upon themselves, ver. 3—12. III. Upon the gracious returns of God to his people to put an end to their captivity and re-establish their prosperity, ver. 13—21.

**T**HE righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come. 2 He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, *each one walking in his uprightness.*

The prophet, in the close of the foregoing chapter, had condemned the watchmen for their ignorance and sottishness; here he shows the general stupidity and senselessness of the people likewise. No wonder they were inconsiderate when their watchmen were so, who should have awakened them to consideration. We may observe here,

I. The providence of God removing good men apace out of this world. *The righteous*, as to this world, *perish*; they are gone and their place knows them no more. Piety exempts none from the arrests of death, nay, in persecuting times, the most righteous are most exposed to the violences of bloody men. The first that died died a martyr. Righteousness delivers from the sting of death, but not from the stroke of it. They are said to *perish* because they are utterly removed from us, and to express the great loss which this world sustains by the removal of them, not that their death is their undoing, but it often proves an undoing to the places where they lived and were useful. Nay, even *merciful men are taken away*, those good men that are distinguished from the righteous, for whom *some would even dare to die*, Rom. v. 7. Those are often removed that could be worst spared; the fruitful trees are cut down by death and the barren left still to cumber the ground. Merciful men are often taken away by the hands of men's malice. Many good works they have done, and for some of them they are stoned. Before the captivity in Babylon perhaps there was a more than ordinary mortality of good men, so that there were scarcely any left, Jer. v. 1. The godly ceased, and the faithful failed, Ps. xii. 1.

II. The careless world slighting these providences, and disregarding them: *No man lays it to heart, none considers it.* There are very few that lament it as a public loss, very few that take notice of it as a public warning. The death of good men is a thing to be laid to heart and considered more than common deaths. Serious enquiries ought to be made, wherefore God contends with us, what good lessons are to be learned by such

providences, what we may do to help to make up the breach and to fill up the room of those that are removed. God is justly displeased when such events are not laid to heart, when the voice of the rod is not heard nor the intentions of it answered, much more when it is rejoiced in, as the slaying of the witnesses is, Rev. xi. 10. Some of God's choicest blessings to mankind, being thus easily parted with, are really undervalued; and it is an evidence of very great incogitancy. Little children, when they are little, least lament the death of their parents, because they know not what a loss it is to them.

III. The happiness of the righteous in their removal.

1. They are *taken away from the evil to come*, then when it is just coming, (1.) In compassion to them, that they may not *see the evil* (2 Kings xxii. 20), nor share in it, nor be in temptation by it. When the deluge is coming they are called into the ark, and have a hiding-place and rest in heaven when there was none for them under heaven. (2.) In wrath to the world, to punish them for all the injuries they have done to the righteous and merciful ones; those are taken away that stood in the gap to turn away the judgments of God, and then what can be expected but a deluge of them? It is a sign that God intends war when he calls home his ambassadors.

2. They go to be easy out of the reach of that evil. The righteous man, who while he lived walked in his uprightness, when he dies *enters into peace and rests in his bed*. Note, (1.) Death is gain, and rest, and bliss, to those only who walked in their uprightness, and who, when they die, can appeal to God concerning it, as Hezekiah (2 Kings xx. 3). *Now, Lord, remember it.* (2.) Those that practised uprightness, and persevered in it to the end, shall find it well with them when they die. Their souls then enter into peace, into the world of peace, where peace is in perfection and where there is no trouble. *Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.* Their bodies rest in their beds. Note, The grave is a bed of rest to all the Lord's people; there they rest from all their labours, Rev. xiv. 13. And the more weary they were the more welcome will that rest be to them, Job iii. 17. This bed is made in the darkness, but that makes it the more quiet; it is a bed out of which they shall rise refreshed in the morning of the resurrection.

3 But draw near hither, ye sons of the sorceress, the seed of the adulterer and the whore. 4 Against whom do ye sport yourselves? Against whom make ye a wide mouth, and draw out the tongue? *Are ye not children of transgression, a seed of falsehood,* 5 Inflaming yourselves with idols under every green tree,

slaying the children in the valleys under the cliffs of the rocks? 6 Among the smooth stones of the stream is thy portion; they, they are thy lot: even to them hast thou poured a drink-offering, thou hast offered a meat-offering. Should I receive comfort in these? 7 Upon a lofty and high mountain hast thou set thy bed: even thither wentest thou up to offer sacrifice. 8 Behind the doors also and the posts hast thou set up thy remembrance: for thou hast discovered *thyself to another* than me, and art gone up; thou hast enlarged thy bed, and made thee a covenant with them; thou lovedst their bed where thou sawest it. 9 And thou wentest to the king with ointment, and didst increase thy perfumes, and didst send thy messengers far off, and didst debase *thyself even* unto hell. 10 Thou art wearied in the greatness of thy way; yet saidst thou not, There is no hope: thou hast found the life of thine hand; therefore thou wast not grieved. 11 And of whom hast thou been afraid or feared, that thou hast lied, and hast not remembered me, nor laid it to thy heart? Have not I held my peace even of old, and thou fearest me not? 12 I will declare thy righteousness, and thy works; for they shall not profit thee.

We have here a high charge, but a just one no doubt, drawn up against that wicked generation out of which God's righteous ones were removed, because the world was not worthy of them. Observe,

I. The general character here given of them, or the name and title by which they stand indicted, v. 3. They are told to draw near and hear the charge, are set to the bar, and arraigned there as *sons of the sorceress*, or of a witch, *the seed of an adulterer and a whore*, that is, they were such themselves, they were strongly inclined to be such, and their ancestors were such before them. Sin is sorcery and adultery, for it is departing from God and dealing with the devil. 'They were children of disobedience.' "Come," says the prophet, "draw near hither, and I will read you your doom; to the righteous death will bring peace and rest, but not to you; you are children of transgression and a seed of falsehood (v. 4), that have it by kind, and have it woven into your very nature, to backslide from God and to deal treacherously with him," ch. xlviii. 8.

II. The particular crimes laid to their charge.

1. Scoffing at God and his word. They were a generation of scornors (v. 4): "*Against whom do you sport yourselves?*" You think it is only against the poor prophets, whom you trample upon as contemptible men, but really it is against God himself, who sends them, and whose message they deliver." Mocking the messengers of the Lord was Jerusalem's measure-filling sin, for what was done to them God took as done to himself. When they were reproved for their sins, and threatened with the judgments of God, they ridiculed the word of God with the rudest and most indecent gestures and expressions of disdain. They sported themselves, and made themselves merry, with that which should have made them serious, and under which they should have humbled themselves. They made wry mouths at the prophets, and drew out the tongue, contrary to all the laws of good breeding; nor did they treat God's prophets with the common civility with which they would have treated a gentleman's servant that had been sent to them on an errand. Note, Those who mock at God, and bid defiance to his judgments, had best consider who it is towards whom they conduct themselves so insolently.

2. Idolatry. This was that sin which the people of the Jews were most notoriously guilty of before the captivity; but that affliction cured them of it. In Isaiah's time it abounded, witness the abominable idolatries of Ahaz (which some think are particularly referred to here) and of Manasseh. (1.) They were dotingly fond of their idols, were inflamed with them, as those that burn in unlawful unnatural lusts, Rom. i. 27. They were mad upon their idols, Jer. l. 38. They inflamed themselves with them by their violent passions in the worship of them, as those of Baal's prophets that *leaped upon the altar, and cut themselves*, 1 Kings xviii. 26, 28. Note, Vile corruptions, the more they are gratified the more they are inflamed. They worshipped their idols under every green tree, in the open air, and in the shade; yet that did not cool the heat of their impetuous lusts, but rather the charming beauty of the green trees made them the more fond of their idols which they worshipped there. Thus that in nature which is pleasing, instead of drawing them to the God of nature, drew them from him. The flame of their zeal in the worship of false gods may shame us for our coldness and indifference in the worship of the true God. They strove to inflame themselves, but we distract and deaden ourselves. (2.) They were barbarous and unnaturally cruel in the worship of their idols. They slew their children, and offered them in sacrifice to their idols, not only in the valley of the son of Hinnom, the headquarters of that monstrous idolatry, but in other valleys, in imitation of that, and under



the cliffs of the rock, in dark and solitary places, the fittest for such works of darkness (3.) They were abundant and insatiable in their idolatries. They never thought they could have idols enough, nor could spend enough upon them and do enough in their service. The Syrians had once a notion of the God of Israel that he was a God of the hills, but not a God of the valleys (1 Kings xx. 28); but these idolaters, to make sure work, had both. [1.] They had gods of the valleys, which they worshipped in the low places by the water side (v. 6): *Among the smooth stones of the valley, or brook, is thy portion*. If they saw a smooth carved stone, though set up but for a way-mark or a mere-stone, they were ready to worship it, as the papists do crosses. Or in stony valleys they set up their gods, which they called their *portion*, and took for their lot, as God's people take him for their lot and portion. But these gods of stone would really be no better a portion for them, no better a lot, than the smooth stones of the stream near which they were set up, for sometimes they worshipped their rivers. "*They, they, are the lot which thou trustest to and art pleased with, but thou shalt be put off with it for thy lot, and miserable will thy case be.*" See the folly of sinners, who take the smooth stones of the stream for their portion, when they might have the precious stones of God's Jerusalem, and the high priest's ephod, to portion themselves with. Having taken these idols for their lot and portion, they stick at no charge in doing honour to them: "*To them hast thou poured a drink-offering, and offered a meat-offering, as if they had given thee thy meat and drink.*" They loved their idols better than their children, for their own tables must be robbed to replenish the altars of their idols. Have we taken the true God for our portion? Is he, even he, our lot? Let us then serve him with our meat and drink, not, as they did, by depriving ourselves of the use of them, but by eating and drinking to his glory. Here, in a parenthesis, comes in an expression of God's just resentment of this wickedness of theirs: *Should I receive comfort in these*—in such a people as this? Can those expect that God will take any pleasure in them, or accept their devotions at his altar, who thus serve Baal with the gifts of his providence? God takes comfort in his people, while they are faithful to him; but what comfort can he take in them when those that should be his witnesses against the idolatries of the world do themselves fall in with them? *Should I have compassion on these?* (so some), or *should I repent me concerning these?* so others. "How can they expect that I should spare them, and either adjourn or abate their punishment when they are so very provoking? *Shall I not visit for these things?*" Jer. v. 7, 9. [2.] They had gods of the hills too (v. 7): "*Upon a lofty and high mountain*

(as if thou wouldst vie with the high and lofty One himself, v. 15) *hast thou set thy bed, thy idol, thy idol's temple and altar, the bed of thy uncleanness, where thou committest spiritual whoredom, with all the wantonness of an idolatrous fancy, and in direct violation of the covenant of thy God. Thither wentest thou up readily enough, though it was up-hill, to offer sacrifice.*" Some think this bespeaks the impudence they arrived at in their idolatries; at first they had some sense of shame, when they worshipped their idols in the valleys, in obscure places; but they soon conquered that, and came to do it upon the lofty high mountains. They were not ashamed, neither could they blush. [3.] As if these were not enough, they had household-gods too, their *lares* and *penates* *Behind the doors and the posts* (v. 8), where the law of God should be written for a memorandum to them of their duty, they set up the remembrance of their idols, not so much to keep up their own remembrance of them (they were so fond of them that they could not forget them), but to show to others how mindful they were of them, and to put their children in mind of them, and possess them betimes with a veneration for these dunghill deities. [4.] As they were insatiable in their idolatries, so they were inseparable from them. They were hardened in their wickedness; they worshipped their idols openly and in public view, as being neither ashamed of the sin nor afraid of the punishment; they went as publicly, and in as great crowds, to the idol-temples, as ever they had gone to God's house. This was like an impudent harlot, *discovering themselves to another than God*, making profession of another than the true religion. They took a pride in making proselytes to their idolatries, and not only went up themselves to their high places, but *enlarged their bed*, that is, their idol-temples, and (as the margin reads the following words) *thou hewedst it for thyself larger than theirs*, than theirs from whom thou copiedst it, and tookest the platform of it, as Ahaz of his altar from that which he saw at Damascus, 2 Kings xvi. 10. And being thus involved over head and ears, as it were, in their idolatries, there is no parting them from them. Ephraim is now joined to idols both in love and league. *First, In league: "Thou hast made a covenant with them, with the idols, with the idol-worshippers, to live and die together."* This was a complete renunciation of their covenant with God and an avowed resolution to persist in their apostasy from him. *Secondly, In love: "Thou lovedst their bed, that is, the temple of an idol, wherever thou sawest it."* Justly therefore were they given up to their own hearts' lusts.

3. Another sin charged upon them is their trusting in and seeking to foreign aids and succours, and contracting a communion with the Gentile powers (v. 9): *Thou wentest to*



the king, which some understand of the idol they worshipped, particularly *Moloch*, which signifies a king. "Thou didst every thing to ingratiate thyself with those idols, didst offer incense and sweet ointments at their altars." Or it may be meant of the king of Assyria, whom Ahaz made his court to, or of the king of Babylon, whose ambassadors Hezekiah caressed, or of other kings of the nations whose idolatrous usages they admired and were desirous to learn and imitate, and for that end went and sent to cultivate an acquaintance and correspondence with them, that they might be like them and strengthen themselves by an alliance with them. See here, (1.) What an expense they were at in forming and procuring this grand alliance. They went *with ointments and perfumes*, either bestowed upon themselves, to beautify their own faces and so make themselves considerable and worthy the friendship of the greatest king, or to be presented to those whose favour they were ambitious of, because a man's gift makes room for him and brings him before great men. "When the first present of rich perfumes was thought too little, thou didst increase them;" and thus many seek the ruler's favour, forgetting that, after all, every man's judgment proceeds from the Lord. So fond were they of those heathen princes that they not only went themselves, in all their airs, to those that were near them, but sent messengers to those that were afar off, *ch. xviii. 2.* (2.) How much they hereby disparaged themselves and laid the honour of their crown and nation in the dust: *Thou didst debase thyself even unto hell.* They did so by their idolatries. It is a dishonour to the children of men, who are endued with the powers of reason, to worship that as their god which is the creature of their own fancy and the work of their own hands, to bow down to the stock of a tree. It is much more a dishonour to the children of God, who are blessed with the privilege of divine revelation, to forsake such a God as they know theirs to be for a thing of nought, their own mercies for lying vanities. They likewise debased themselves by truckling to their heathen neighbours, and depending upon them, when they had a God to go to who is all-sufficient and in covenant with them. How did those shame themselves to the highest degree, and sink themselves to the lowest, that forsook the fountain of life for broken cisterns and the rock of ages for broken reeds! Note, Sinners disparage and debase themselves; the service of sin is an ignominious slavery; and those who thus debase themselves to hell will justly have their portion there.

III. The aggravations of their sin. 1. They had been tired with disappointments in their wicked courses, and yet they would not be convinced of the folly of them (*v. 10*): "*Thou art wearied in the greatness of thy way; thou hast undertaken a mighty task, to find*

out true satisfaction and happiness in that which is vanity and a lie." Those that set up idols, instead of God, for the object of their worship, and princes, instead of God, for the object of their hope and confidence, and think thus to better themselves and make themselves easy, go a great way about, and will never come to their journey's end: *Thou art wearied in the multitude, or multiplicity, of thy ways* (so some read it): those that forsake the only right way wander endlessly in a thousand by-paths, and lose themselves in the many inventions which they have sought out. They weary themselves with fresh chases and fierce ones, but never gain their point, like the Sodomites, that *wearied themselves to find the door* (*Gen. xix. 11*) and could not find it at last. The pleasures of sin will soon surfeit, but never satisfy; a man may quickly tire himself in the pursuit of them, but can never repose himself in the enjoyment of them. They found this by experience. The idols they had often worshipped never did them any kindness; the kings they courted distressed them, and helped them not; and yet they were so wretchedly besotted that they could not say, "*There is no hope*; it is in vain any longer to expect that satisfaction in creature-confidences, and in the worship of idols, which we have so often looked for, and never met with." Note, Despair of happiness in the creature, and of satisfaction in the service of sin, is the first step towards a well-grounded hope of happiness in God and a well-fixed resolution to keep to his service; and those are inexcusable who have had sensible convictions of the vanity of the creature, and yet will not be brought to say, "*There is no hope to be happy short of the Creator.*" 2. Though they were convinced that the way they were in was a sinful way, yet, because they had found some present sensual pleasure and worldly profit by it, they could not persuade themselves to be sorry for it: "*Thou hast found the life of thy hand*" (or *the living of it*); thou boastest how fortune smiles upon thee, and therefore thou art not grieved, any more than Ephraim when he said (*Hos. xii. 8*), *I have become rich; I have found out substance.*" Note, Prosperity in sin is a great bar to conversion from sin. Those that live at ease in their sinful pleasures, and raise estates by their sinful projects, are tempted to think God favours them, and therefore they have nothing to repent of. Some read it ironically, or by way of question: "Thou hast found the life of thy hand, hast found true satisfaction and happiness, no doubt thou hast; hast thou not? And therefore thou art so far from being grieved that thou blestest thyself in thy own evil way; but review thy gains once more, and come to a balance of profit and loss, and then say, What fruit hast thou of those things whereof thou art ashamed and for which God shall bring thee into judgment?"



Rom. vi. 21. 3. They had dealt very unworthily with God by their sin; for, (1.) It should seem they pretended that the reason why they left God was because he was too terrible a majesty for them to deal with; they must have gods that they could be more free and familiar with. "But," says God, "*of whom hast thou been afraid or feared, that thou hast lied, that thou hast dealt falsely and treacherously with me, and dissembled in thy covenants with me and prayers to me? What did I ever do to frighten thee from me? What occasion have I given thee to think hardly of me, that thou hast gone to seek a kinder master?*" (2.) However, it is certain that they had no true reverence of God nor any serious regard to him. So that question is commonly understood, "*Of whom hast thou been afraid, or feared?*" Of none; for thou hast not feared me whom thou shouldst fear; for thou hast lied to me." Those that dissemble with God make it to appear they stand in no awe of him. "*Thou hast not remembered me, neither what I have said nor what I have done, neither the promises nor the threatenings, nor the performances of either; thou hast not laid them to thy heart, as thou wouldst have done if thou hadst feared me.*" Note, Those who lay not the word of God and his providences to their hearts do thereby show that they have not the fear of God before their eyes. And multitudes are ruined by fearlessness, forgetfulness, and mere carelessness; they do not aright nor to good purpose fear any thing, remember any thing, nor lay any thing to heart. Nay, (3.) They were hardened in their sin by the patience and forbearance of God. "*Have not I held my peace of old, and for a long time? These things thou hast done and I kept silence. And therefore, as it follows here, thou fearest me not;*" as if because God had spared long he would never punish, Eccl. viii. 11. Because he kept silence the sinner thought him altogether such a one as himself, and stood in no awe of him.

IV. Here is God's resolution to call them to an account, though he had long borne with them (v. 12): "*I will declare* (like that, Ps. 1. 21, *But I will reprove thee*), *I will declare thy righteousness, which thou makest thy boast of, and let the world see, and thyself too, to thy confusion; that it is all a sham, all a cheat, it is not what it pretends to be. When thy righteousness comes to be examined it will be found that it was unrighteousness, and that there was no sincerity in all thy pretensions. I will declare thy works, what they have been and what the gain thou pretendest to have gotten by them, and it will appear that at long-run they shall not profit thee, nor turn to any account.*" Note, Sinful works, as they are works of darkness, and there is no reason nor righteousness in them, so they are unfruitful works and there is nothing got by them; and, however they

look now, it will be made to appear so another day. Sin profits not, nay, it ruins and destroys.

13 When thou criest, let thy companies deliver thee; but the wind shall carry them all away; vanity shall take them: but he that putteth his trust in me shall possess the land, and shall inherit my holy mountain; 14 And shall say, Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumbling block out of the way of my people. 15 For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. 16 For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made.

Here, I. God shows how insufficient idols and creatures were to relieve and succour those that worshipped them and confided in them (v. 13): "*When thou criest in thy distress and anguish, lamentest thy misery and callest for help, let thy companies deliver thee, thy idol-gods which thou hast heaped to thyself companies of, the troops of the confederate forces which thou hast relied so much upon, let them deliver thee if they can; expect no other relief than what they can give.*" Thus God said to Israel, when in their trouble they called upon him (Judg. x. 14), *Go, and cry to the gods which you have chosen, let them deliver you.* But in vain is salvation hoped for from them: *The wind shall carry them all away*, the wind of God's wrath, that breath of his mouth which shall slay the wicked; they have made themselves as chaff, and therefore the wind will of course hurry them away. Vanity they are, and *vanity shall take them away*, to vanity they shall be reduced, and vanity shall be their recompence. Both the idols and their worshippers shall come to nothing.

II. He shows that there was a sufficiency, an all-sufficiency, in him for the comfort and deliverance of all those that put their confidence in him and made their application to him. Their safety and satisfaction appear the more comfortable because their hopes are crowned with fruition, when those that seek to other helpers have their hopes frustrated: "*He that puts his trust in me, and in me only, he shall be happy, both for soul and body, for this world and the other.*"

1. Observe, in general, (1.) Those that trust in God's providence take the best course to secure their secular interests. *They shall possess the land, as much of it as*

is good for them, and what they have they shall have it from a good hand and hold it by a good title. Ps. xxxvii. 3, *They shall dwell in the land, and verily they shall be fed.* (2.) Those that trust in God's grace take the best course to secure their sacred interests. *They shall inherit my holy mountain.* They shall enjoy the privileges of the church on earth, and be brought at length to the joys of heaven; and no wind shall carry them away.

2. More particularly,

(1.) The captives, that trust in God, shall be released (v. 14): *They shall say* (that is, the messengers of his word, and all the ministers of his providence, in that great event shall say), *Cast you up, cast you up, prepare the way.* When God's time shall have come for their deliverance the way of bringing it about shall be made plain and easy, obstacles shall be removed, difficulties that seemed insuperable shall be speedily got over, and all things shall concur both to accelerate and facilitate their return. See ch. xl. 3, 4. This refers to the provision which the gospel, and the grace of it, have made for our ready passage through this world to a better. The way of religion is now cast up; it is a highway; ministers' business is to direct people in it, and to help them over the discouragements they meet with, that nothing may offend them.

(2.) The contrite, that trust in God, shall be revived, v. 15. Those that trusted to idols and creatures for help went with their *ointments and perfumes* (v. 9); but here God shows that those who may expect help from him are such as are destitute of, and set themselves at a distance from, the gaieties of the world and the delights of sense. God's glory appears here very bright, [1.] In his greatness and majesty: He is the *high and lofty One that inhabits eternity.* Let this inspire us with very high and honourable thoughts of the God with whom we have to do, *First*, That his being and perfections are exalted infinitely above every creature, not only above what they have themselves, but above what they can conceive concerning him, *far above all their blessing and praise*, Neh. ix. 5. He is the *high and lofty One*, and there is no creature like him, nor any to be compared with him. The language likewise intimates his sovereign dominion over all and the incontestable right he has to give both law and judgment to all. He is *higher than the highest* (Eccl. v. 8), than the *highest heavens*, Ps. cxlii. 4. *Secondly*, That with him there is neither beginning of days nor end of life, nor change of time; he is both immortal and immutable. He only *has immortality*, 1 Tim. vi. 16. He has it of himself, and he has it constantly; he inhabits it, and cannot be dispossessed of it. We must shortly remove into eternity, but God always inhabits it. *Thirdly*, That there is an infinite rectitude in his nature, and an exact conformity with himself and a steady

design of his own glory in all that he does; and this appears in every thing by which he has made himself known, for his name is *holy*, and all that desire to be acquainted with him must know him as a holy God. *Fourthly*, That the peculiar residence and manifestation of his glory are in the mansions of light and bliss above: "*I dwell in the high and holy place*, and will have all the world to know it." Whoever have any business with God must direct to him as their Father in heaven, for there he dwells. These great things are here said of God to inspire us with a holy reverence of him, to encourage our confidence in him, and to magnify his compassion and condescension to us, that though he is thus high yet he has respect unto the lowly; he that rides on the heavens by his name JAH stoops to concern himself for poor *widows* and *fatherless*, Ps. lxxviii. 4, 5. [2.] In his grace and mercy. He has a tender pity for the humble and contrite, for those that are so in respect of their state. If they be his people, he will not overlook them though they are poor and low in the world, and despised and trampled upon by men; but he here refers to the temper of their mind; he will have a tender regard to those who, being in affliction, accommodate themselves to their affliction, and bring their mind to their condition, be it ever so low and ever so sad and sorely broken—those that are truly penitent for sin, who mourn in secret for it, and have a dread of the wrath of God, which they have made themselves obnoxious to, and are submissive under all his rebukes. Now, *First*, With these God will dwell. He will visit them graciously, will converse familiarly with them by his word and Spirit, as a man does with those of his own family; he will be always nigh to them and present with them. He that dwells in the highest heavens dwells in the lowest hearts and inhabits sincerity as surely as he inhabits eternity. In these he delights. *Secondly*, He will revive their heart and spirit, will speak that to them, and work that in them by the word and Spirit of his grace, which will be reviving to them, as a cordial to one that is ready to faint. He will give them reviving joys and hopes sufficient to counterbalance all the griefs and fears that break their spirits. He dwells with them, and his presence is reviving.

(3.) Those with whom he contends, if they trust in him, shall be relieved, and received into favour, v. 16. He will *revive the heart of the contrite ones*, for he will not contend for ever. Nothing makes a soul contrite so much as God's contending, and therefore nothing revives it so much as his ceasing his controversy. Here is, [1.] A gracious promise. It is not promised that he will never be angry with his people, for their sins are displeasing to him, or that he will never contend with them, for they must



expect the rod; but he *will not contend for ever*, nor be always wroth. As he is not soon angry, so he is not long angry. He will not always chide. Though he contend with them by convictions of sin, he will not contend for ever; but, instead of the spirit of bondage, they shall receive the Spirit of adoption. He has torn, but he will heal. Though he contend with them by the rebukes of providence, yet the correction shall not last always, shall not last long, shall last no longer than there is need (1 Pet. i. 6), no longer than they can bear, no longer than till it has done its work. Though their whole life be calamitous, yet their end will be peace, and so will their eternity be. [2.] A very compassionate consideration, upon which this promise is grounded: "If I should contend for ever, *the spirit would fail before me, even the souls which I have made.*" Note, *First*, God is the Father of spirits, Heb. xii. 9. Those with whom he will not always contend are the souls that he has made, that he gave being to by creation and a new being to by regeneration. *Secondly*, Though the Lord is for the body, yet he concerns himself chiefly for the souls of his people, that the spirit do not fail, and its graces and comforts. *Thirdly*, When troubles last long, the spirit even of good men is apt to fail. They are tempted to entertain hard thoughts of God, to think it in vain to serve him; they are ready to put comfort away from them, and to despair of relief, and then the spirit fails. *Fourthly*, It is in consideration of this that God will not contend for ever; for he will not forsake the work of his own hands nor defeat the purchase of his Son's blood. The reason is taken not from our merit, but from our weakness and infirmity; for *he remembers that we are flesh* (Ps. lxxviii. 39) and that flesh is weak.

17 For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. 18 I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners. 19 I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace, to *him that is far off*, and to *him that is near*, saith the LORD; and I will heal him. 20 But the wicked *are* like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. 21 *There is no peace*, saith my God, to the wicked.

The body of the people of Israel, in this account of God's dealings with them, is spoken of as a particular person (v. 17, 18), but divided into two sorts, differently dealt with—some who were sons of peace, to whom peace is spoken (v. 19), and others who were

not, who have nothing to do with peace, v. 20, 21. Observe here,

I. The just rebukes which that people were brought under for their sin: *For the iniquity of his covetousness I was wroth, and smote him.* Covetousness was a sin that abounded very much among that people. Jer. vi. 13, *From the least to the greatest of them, every one is given to covetousness.* Those that did not worship images were yet carried away by this spiritual idolatry: for such is covetousness; it is making money the god, Col. iii. 5. No marvel that the people were covetous when their watchmen themselves were notoriously so, ch. lvi. 11. Yet, covetous as they were, in the service of their idols they were prodigal, v. 6. And it is hard to say whether their profuseness in that or their covetousness in every thing else was more provoking. But for this iniquity, among others, God was angry with them, and brought one judgment after another upon them, and their destruction at last by the Chaldeans. 1. God was wroth. He resented it, took it very ill that a people who were devoted to himself, and portioned in himself, should be so entirely given up to the world and choose that for their portion. Note, Covetousness is an iniquity that is very displeasing to the God of heaven. It is a heart-sin, but he sees it, and therefore hates it, and looks upon it with jealousy, because it sets up a rival with him in the soul. It is a sin which men *bless themselves* in (Ps. cxix. 18) and in which their neighbours *bless them* (Ps. x. 3); but God abhors it. 2. He smote him, reproved him for it by his prophets, corrected him by his providence, punished him in those very things he so doted upon and was covetous of. Note, Sinners shall be made to feel from the anger of God. Those whom he is wroth with he smites; and covetousness particularly lays men under the tokens of God's displeasure. Those that set their hearts upon the wealth of this world are disappointed of it or it is embittered to them; it is either clogged with a cross or turned into a curse. 3. God hid himself from him when he was under these rebukes, and continued wroth with him. When we are under the rod, if God manifest himself to us, we may bear it the better; but if he both smite us and hide himself from us, send us no prophets, speak to us no comfortable word, show us no token for good, if he *tear and go away* (Hos. v. 14), we are very miserable.

II. Their obstinacy and incorrigibleness under these rebukes: *He went on frowardly in the way of his heart*, in his evil way. He was not sensible of the displeasure of God that he was under. He felt the smart of the rod, but had no regard at all to the hand; the more he was crossed in his worldly pursuits the more eager he was in them. He either would not see his error or if he saw it would not amend it. Covetousness was

the way of his heart; it was what he was inclined to and intent upon, and he would not be reclaimed, but *in his distress he trespassed yet more*, 2 Chron. xxviii. 22. See the strength of the corruption of men's hearts, and the sinfulness of sin, which will take its course in despite of God himself and all the flames of his wrath. See also how insufficient afflictions of themselves are to reform men, unless God's grace work with them.

III. God's wonderful return in mercy to them, notwithstanding the obstinacy of the generality of them.

1. The greater part of them went on frowardly, but there were some among them that were mourners for the obstinacy of the rest; and with an eye to them, or rather for his own name's sake, God determines not to contend for ever with them. *With the froward* God may justly *show himself froward* (Ps. xviii. 26), and *walk contrary* to those that *walk contrary* to him, Lev. xxvii. 24. When this sinner here went on frowardly in the way of his heart, one would think it should have followed, "I have seen his ways and will destroy him, will abandon him, will never have any thing more to do with him." But such are the riches of divine mercy and grace, and so do they rejoice against judgment, that it follows, *I have seen his ways and will heal him*. See how God's goodness takes occasion from man's badness to appear so much the more illustrious; and where sin has abounded grace much more abounds. God's reasons of mercy are fetched from within himself, for in us there appears nothing but what is provoking. "I have seen his ways, and yet I will heal him for my own name's sake." God knew how bad the people were, and yet would not cast them off. But observe the method. God will first give him grace, and then, and not till then, give him peace: "I have seen his way, that he will never turn to me of himself, and therefore I will turn him." Those whom God has mercy in store for he has grace in readiness for, to prepare and qualify them for that mercy which they were running from as fast as they could. (1.) God will heal him of his corrupt and vicious disposition, will cure him of his covetousness, though it be ever so deeply rooted in him and his heart have been long exercised to covetous practices. There is no spiritual disease so inveterate, but almighty grace can conquer it. (2.) *God will lead him also*; not only amend what was amiss in him, that he may cease to do evil, but direct him into the way of duty, that he may learn to do well. He goes on frowardly, as Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter, but God will lead him into a better mind, a better path. And then, (3.) He will restore those comforts to him which he had forfeited and lost, and for the return of which he had thus prepared him. There was a wonderful reformation wrought upon the captives in

Babylon, and then a wonderful redemption wrought for them, which brought comfort to them, to their mourners, to those among them that mourned for their own sins, the sins of their people, and the desolations of the sanctuary. To those mourners the mercy would be most comfortable, and to them God had an eye in working it out. Blessed are those that mourn, for to them comfort belongs, and they shall have it.

2. Now, as when that people went into captivity some of them were good figs, very good, others of them bad figs, very bad, and accordingly their captivity was to them for their good or for *their hurt* (Jer. xxiv. 8, 9), so, when they came out of captivity, still some of them were good, others bad, and the deliverance was to them accordingly.

(1.) To those among them that were good their return out of captivity was peace, such peace as was a type and earnest of the peace which should be preached by Jesus Christ (v. 19): *I create the fruit of the lips, peace*. [1.] God designed to give them matter for praise and thanksgiving, for that is the *fruit of the lips* (Heb. xiii. 15), the *calves of the lips*, Hos. xiv. 2. *I create this*. Creation is out of nothing, and this is surely out of worse than nothing, when God creates matter of praise for those that went on frowardly in the way of their heart. [2.] In order to this, peace shall be published: *Peace, peace* (perfect peace, all kinds of peace) *to him that is afar off* from the general rendezvous, or from the head-quarters, as well as *to him that is near*. Peace with God; though he has contended with them, he will be reconciled and will let fall his controversy. Peace of conscience, a holy security and serenity of mind, after the many reproaches of conscience and agitations of spirit they had been under in their captivity. Thus God creates the fruit of the lips, fresh matter for thanksgiving; for, when he speaks peace to us, we must speak praises to him. This peace is itself of God's creating. He, and he only, can work it; it is the fruit of the lips, of his lips—he commands it, of the minister's lips—he speaks it by them, ch. xl. 1. It is the fruit of preaching lips and praying lips; it is the fruit of Christ's lips, whose lips drop as a honeycomb; for to him this is applied, Eph. ii. 17: *He came and preached peace to you who were afar off*, you Gentiles as well as to the Jews, who were nigh—to after-ages, who were afar off in time, as well as to those of the present age.

(2.) To those among them that were wicked, though they might return with the rest, their return was no peace, v. 20. The wicked, wherever he is, in Babylon or in Jerusalem, carries about with him the principle of his own uncasiness, and is like the troubled sea. God healed those to whom he spoke peace (v. 19): *I will heal them*; all shall be well again and set to rights; but the wicked would not be healed by the grace



of God and therefore shall not be healed by his comforts. They are always like the sea in a storm, for they carry about with them, [1.] Unmortified corruptions. They are not cured and conquered, and their ungoverned lusts and passions make them like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, vexatious to all about them and therefore uneasy to themselves, noisy and dangerous. When the intemperate heats of the spirit break out in scurrilous and abusive language, then the troubled sea casts forth mire and dirt. [2.] Unpacified consciences. They are under a frightful apprehension of guilt and wrath, that they cannot enjoy themselves; when they seem settled they are in disquietude, when they seem merry they are in heaviness; like Cain, who always dwelt in the land of shaking. The terrors of conscience disturb all their enjoyments, and cast forth such mire and dirt as make them a burden to themselves. Though this does not appear (it may be) at present, yet it is a certain truth, what this prophet had said before (*ch. xlviii. 22*), and here repeats (*v. 21*), *There is no peace to the wicked*, no reconciliation to God (nor can they be upon good terms with him, while they go on still in their trespasses), no quietness or satisfaction in their own mind, no real good, no peace in death, because no hope. *My God hath said it*, and all the world cannot unsay it, That there is no peace to those that allow themselves in any sin. What have they to do with peace?

## CHAP. LVIII.

The prophet, in this chapter, has his commission and charge renewed to reprove the sinners in Zion, particularly the hypocrites, to show them their transgressions, *ver. 1*. It is intended for admonition and warning to all hypocrites, and is not to be confined to those of any one age. Some refer it primarily to those at that time when Isaiah prophesied; see *chap. xxviii. 14; xlii. 13*. Others to the captives in Babylon, the wicked among them, to whom the prophet had declared there was no peace, *ch. lvi. 21*. Against the terror of that word they thought to shelter themselves with their external performances, particularly their fastings, which they kept up in Babylon, and for some time after their return to their own land, *Zech. vii. 3, &c.* The prophet therefore here shows them that their devotions would not entitle them to peace while their conversations were not at all of a piece with them. Others think it is principally intended against the hypocrisy of the Jews, especially the Pharisees before and in our Saviour's time: they boasted of their fastings, but Christ (as the prophet here) showed them their transgressions (*Matt. xxiii.*), much the same with those they are here charged with. Observe, I. The plausible profession of religion which they made, *ver. 2*. II. The boasts they made of that profession, and the blame they laid upon God for taking no more notice of it, *ver. 3*. III. The sins they are charged with, which spoiled the acceptableness of their fasts, *ver. 4, 5*. IV. Instructions given them how to keep fasts aright, *ver. 6, 7*. V. Precious promises made to those who do so keep fasts, *ver. 8-12*. VI. The like precious promises made to those that sanctify sabbaths aright, *ver. 13, 14*.

**C**RY aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. 2 Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God.

When our Lord Jesus promised to send the Comforter he added, *When he shall come he shall convince* (*John xvi. 7, 8*); for conviction must prepare for comfort, and must also separate between the precious and the vile, and mark out those to whom comfort does not belong. God had appointed this prophet to comfort his people (*ch. xl. 1*); here he appoints him to convince them, and show them their sins.

I. He must tell them how very bad they really were, *v. 1*. 1. He must deal faithfully and plainly with them. "Though they are called the *people of God* and the *house of Jacob*, though they wear an honourable title and character, by which they are interested in many glorious privileges, yet do not flatter them, but show them their transgressions and their sins, be particular in telling them their faults, what sins are committed among them, which they do not know of, nay, what sins are committed by them which they do not acknowledge to be sins; though in some things they are reformed, let them know that in other things they are still as bad as ever. Show them their transgressions and their sins, that is, all their transgressions in their sins, their sins and all the aggravations of them," *Lev. xvi. 21*. Note, (1.) God sees sin in his people, in the house of Jacob, and is displeased with it. (2.) They are often unapt and unwilling to see their own sins, and need to have them shown them, and to be told, *Thus and thus thou hast done*. 2. He must be vehement and in good earnest herein, *must cry aloud, and not spare*, not spare them (not touch them with his reproofs as if he were afraid of hurting them, but search the wound to the bottom, lay it bare to the bone), not spare himself or his own pains, but cry as loud as he can; though he spend his strength and waste his spirits, though he get their ill-will by it and get himself into an ill name, yet he must not spare. He must lift up his voice like a trumpet, to make those hear of their faults that were apt to be deaf when admonition was addressed to them. He must give his reproofs in the most powerful and pressing manner possible, as one who desired to be heeded. The trumpet does not give an uncertain sound, but, though loud and shrill, is intelligible; so must his alarms be, giving them warning of the fatal consequences of sin, *Ezek. xxxiii. 3*.

II. He must acknowledge how very good they seemed to be, notwithstanding (*v. 2*): *Yet they seek me daily*. When the prophet went about to show them their transgressions they pleaded that they could see no transgressions which they were guilty of; for they were diligent and constant in attending on God's worship—and what more would he have of them? Now,

1. He owns the matter of fact to be true. As far as hypocrites do that which is good,

they shall not be denied the praise of it; let them make their best of it. It is owned that they have a form of godliness. (1.) They go to church, and observe their hours of prayer: *They seek me daily*; they are very constant in their devotions and never omit them nor suffer any thing to put them by. (2.) They love to hear good preaching: *They delight to know my ways*, as Herod, who heard John gladly, and the stony ground, that received the seed of the word with joy; it is to them *as a lovely song*, Ezek. xxxiii. 32. (3.) They seem to take a great pleasure in the exercises of religion and to be in their element when they are at their devotions: *They delight in approaching to God*, not for his sake to whom they approach, but for the sake of some pleasing circumstance, the company, or the festival. (4.) They are inquisitive concerning their duty and seem desirous only to know it, making no question but that then they should do it: *They ask of me the ordinances of justice*, the rules of piety in the worship of God, the rules of equity in their dealings with men, both which are ordinances of justice. (5.) They appear to the eye of the world as if they made conscience of doing their duty: *They are as a nation that did righteousness and forsook not the ordinances of their God*; others took them for such, and they themselves pretended to be such. Nothing lay open to view that was a contradiction to their profession, but they seemed to be such as they should be. Note, Men may go a great way towards heaven and yet come short; nay, may go to hell with a good reputation. But,

2. He intimates that this was so far from being a cover or excuse for their sin that really it was an aggravation of it: "Show them their sins which they go on in notwithstanding their knowledge of good and evil, sin and duty, and the convictions of their consciences concerning them."

3 Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? *Wherefore* have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours. 4 Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as *ye do this day*, to make your voice to be heard on high. 5 Is it such a fast that I have chosen? A day for a man to afflict his soul? *Is it* to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes *under him*? Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? 6 *Is* not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy bur-

dens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? 7 *Is it* not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?

Here we have, I. The displeasure which these hypocrites conceived against God for not accepting the services which they themselves had a mighty opinion of (v. 3). *Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not?* Thus they went in the way of Cain, who was angry at God, and resented it as a gross affront that his offering was not accepted. Having gone about to put a cheat upon God by their external services, here they go about to pick a quarrel with God for not being pleased with their services, as if he had not done fairly or justly by them. Observe, 1. How they boast of themselves, and magnify their own performances: "*We have fasted, and afflicted our souls*"; we have not only sought God daily (v. 2), but have kept some certain times of more solemn devotion." Some think this refers to the yearly fast (which was called *the day of atonement*), others to their arbitrary occasional fasts. Note, It is common for unhumiliated hearts to be proud of their professions of humiliation, as the Pharisee (Luke xviii. 12), *I fast twice in the week*. 2. What they expected from their performances. They thought God should take great notice of them, and own himself a debtor to them for their services. Note, It is a common thing for hypocrites, while they perform the external services of religion, to promise themselves that acceptance with God which he has promised only to the sincere; as if they must be accepted of course, or for a compliment. 3. How heinously they take it that God had not put some particular marks of his favour upon them, that he had not immediately delivered them out of their troubles and advanced them to honour and prosperity. They charge God with injustice and partiality, and seem resolved to throw up their religion, and justify themselves in doing so with this, that they had found no *profit in praying* to God, Job xxi. 14, 15; Mal. iii. 14. Note, Reigning hypocrisy often breaks out in daring impiety and an open contempt and reproach of God and religion for that which the hypocrisy itself must bear all the blame of. Sinners reflect upon religion as a hard and melancholy service, and one which there is nothing to be got by, when really it is owing to themselves that it seems so to them, because they are not sincere in it.

II. The true reason assigned why God did not accept their fastings, nor answer the prayers they made on their fast-days; it was because they did not fast aright—to



God, even to him, Zech. vii. 5. They fasted indeed, but they persisted in their sins, and did not, as the Ninevites, turn every one from his evil way; but *in the day of their fast*, and notwithstanding the professed humiliations and covenants of that day, they went on to *find pleasure*, that is, to do whatsoever seemed right in their own eyes, lawful or unlawful, *quicquid libet, licet*—making *their inclinations their law*; though they seemed to afflict their souls, they still gratified their lusts as much as ever. 1. They were as covetous and unmerciful as ever: “*You exact all your labours from your servants, and will neither release them according to the law nor relax the rigour of their servitude.*” This was their fault before the captivity, Jer. xxxiv. 8, 9. It was no less their fault after their captivity, notwithstanding all their solemn fasts, Neh. v. 5. “*You exact all your dues, your debts*” (so some read it); you are as rigorous and severe in extorting what you demand from those that are poor as ever you were, though it was at the close of the yearly fast that the release was proclaimed.” 2. They were contentious and spiteful (v. 4): *Behold, you fast for strife and debate.* When they proclaimed a fast to deprecate God’s judgments, they pretended to search for those sins which provoked God to threaten them with his judgments, and under that pretence perhaps particular persons were falsely accused, as Naboth in the day of Jezebel’s fast, 1 Kings xxi. 12. Or the contending parties among them upon those occasions were bitter and severe in their reflections one upon another, one side crying out, “*It is owing to you,*” and the other, “*It is owing to you, that our deliverance is not wrought.*” Thus, instead of judging themselves, which is the proper work of a fast-day, they condemned one another. They *fasted for strife*, with emulation which should make the most plausible appearance on a fast-day and humour the matter best. Nor was it only tongue-quarrels that were fomented in the times of their fasting, but they came to blows too: *You smite with the fist of wickedness.* The cruel task-masters beat their servants, and the creditors their insolvent debtors, whom they delivered to the tormentors; they abused poor innocents *with wicked hands.* Now while they thus *continued in sin*, in those very sins which were directly contrary to the intention of a fasting day, (1.) God would not allow them the use of such solemnities: “*You shall not fast at all if you fast as you do this day, causing your voice to be heard on high*, in the heat of your clamours one against another, or in your devotions, which you perform so as to make them to be taken notice of for ostentation. *Bring me no more of these empty, noisy, vain oblations,*” ch. i. 13. Note, Those are justly forbidden the honour of a profession of religion that will not submit to the power of it. (2.) He would

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not accept of them in the use of them: “*You shall not fast*, that is, it shall not be looked upon as a fast, nor shall the voice of your prayers on those days be heard on high in heaven.” Note, Those that fast and pray, and yet go on in their wicked ways, do but mock God and deceive themselves.

III. Plain instructions given concerning the true nature of a religious fast.

1. In general, a fast is intended, (1.) For the honouring and pleasing of God. It must be such a performance as he has chosen (v. 5); it must be *an acceptable day to the Lord*, in the duties of which we must study to approve ourselves to him and obtain his favour, else it is not a fast, else there is nothing done to any purpose. (2.) For the humbling and abasing of ourselves. A fast is *a day to afflict the soul*; if it do not express a genuine sorrow for sin, and do not promote a real mortification of sin, it is not a fast; the law of the day of atonement was that on that day they should *afflict their souls*, Lev. xvi. 29. That must be done on a fast-day which is a real affliction to the soul, as far as it is yet unregenerate and unsanctified, though a real pleasure and advantage to the soul as far as it is itself.

2. It concerns us therefore to enquire, on a fast-day, what it is that will be acceptable to God, and afflictive to our corrupt nature, and tending to its mortification.

(1.) We are here told negatively what is not the fast that God has chosen, and which does not amount to the afflicting of the soul. [1.] It is not enough to look demure, to put on a grave and melancholy aspect, to bow down the head like a bulrush that is withered and broken: as the hypocrites, that were *of a sad countenance, and disfigured their faces, that they might appear unto men to fast*, Matt. vi. 16. Hanging down the head did indeed well enough become the publican, whose heart was truly humbled and broken for sin, and who therefore, in token of that, *would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven* (Luke xviii. 13); but when it was only mimicked, as here, it was justly ridiculed: it is but *hanging down the head like a bulrush*, which nobody regards or takes any notice of. As the hypocrite’s humiliations are but like the hanging down of a bulrush, so his elevations in his hopes are but like the *flourishing of a bulrush* (Job viii. 11, 12), which, *while it is yet in its greenness, withers before any other herb.* [2.] It is not enough to do penance, to mortify the body a little, while the body of sin is untouched. It is not enough for a man *to spread sackcloth and ashes under him*, which may indeed give him some uneasiness for the present, but will soon be forgotten when he returns *to stretch himself upon his beds of ivory*, Amos vi. 4. *Will thou call this a fast?* No, it is but the shadow and carcase of a fast. *Will thou call this an acceptable day to the Lord?* No, it is so far from being so

that the hypocrisy of it is an abomination to him. Note, The shows of religion, though they show ever so fair in the eye of the world, will not be accepted of God without the substance of it.

(2.) We are here told positively what is the fast that God has chosen, what that is which will recommend a fast-day to the divine acceptance, and what is indeed afflicting the soul, that is, crushing and subduing the corrupt nature. *It is not afflicting the soul for a day* (as some read it, v. 5) that will serve; no, it must be the business of our whole lives. It is here required, [1.] That we be just to those with whom we have dealt hardly. The fast that God has chosen consists in reforming our lives and undoing what we have done amiss (v. 6): *To loose the bands of wickedness*, the bands which we have wickedly tied, and by which others are bound out from their right or bound down under severe usage. Those which perhaps were at first bands of justice, tying men to pay a due debt, become, when the debt is exacted with rigour from those whom Providence has reduced and emptied, *bands of wickedness*, and they must be loosed, or they will bring us into bonds of guilt much more terrible. It is *to undo the heavy burden* laid on the back of the poor servant, under which he is ready to sink. It is *to let the oppressed go free* from the oppression which makes his life bitter to him. "Let the prisoner for debt that has nothing to pay be discharged, let the vexatious action be quashed, let the servant that is forcibly detained beyond the time of his servitude be released, and thus *break every yoke*; not only let go those that are wrongfully kept under the yoke, but break the yoke of slavery itself, that it may not serve again another time nor any be made again to serve under it." [2.] That we be charitable to those that stand in need of charity, v. 7. The particulars in the former verse *may* be taken as acts of charity, that we not only release those whom we have unjustly oppressed—that is justice, but that we contribute to the rescue and ransom of those that are oppressed by others, to the release of captives and the payment of the debts of the poor; but those in this verse are *plainly* acts of charity. This then is the fast that God has chosen. *First*, To provide food for those that want it. This is put first, as the most necessary, and which the poor can but a little while live without. It is *to break thy bread to the hungry*. Observe, "It must be *thy bread*, that which is honestly got (not that which thou hast robbed others of), the bread which thou thyself hast occasion for, the bread of thy allowance." We must deny ourselves, that we may have to give to him that needeth. "Thy bread which thou hast spared from thyself and thy family, on the fast-day, if that, or the value of it, be not given to the poor, it is the miser's fast, which he makes

a hand of; it is fasting for the world, not for God. This is the true fast, to break thy bread to the hungry, not only to give them that which is already broken meat, but to break bread on purpose for them, to give them loaves and not to put them off with scraps." *Secondly*, To provide lodging for those that want it: It is *to take care of the poor that are cast out*, that are forced from their dwelling, turned out of house and harbour, *are cast out as rebels* (so some critics render it), that are attainted, and whom therefore it is highly penal to protect. "If they suffer unjustly, make no difficulty of sheltering them; do not only find out quarters for them and pay for their lodging elsewhere, but, which is a greater act of kindness, bring them to thy own house, make them thy own guests. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for though thou mayest not, as some have done, thereby entertain angels, thou mayest entertain Christ himself, who will recompense it in the resurrection of the just. *I was a stranger and you took me in.*" *Thirdly*, To provide clothing for those that want it: "*When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him*, both to shelter him from the injuries of the weather and to enable him to appear decently among his neighbours; give him clothes to come to church in, and in these and other instances *hide not thyself from thy own flesh.*" Some understand it more strictly of a man's own kindred and relations: "If those of thy own house and family fall into decay, thou art *worse than an infidel* if thou dost not *provide* for them," 1 Tim. v. 8. Others understand it more generally; all that partake of the human nature are to be looked upon as our own flesh, for have we not all one Father? And for this reason we must not hide ourselves from them, not contrive to be out of the way when a poor petitioner enquires for us, not look another way when a moving object of charity and compassion presents itself; let us remember that they are flesh of our flesh and therefore we ought to sympathize with them, and in doing good to them we really do good to our own flesh and spirit too in the issue; for thus *we lay up for ourselves a good foundation*, a good bond; *for the time to come.*

8 Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward. 9 Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; 10 And if thou draw out thy soul to the hun-



gry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness *be* as the noon-day: 11 And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. 12 And *they that shall be* of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, the restorer of paths to dwell in.

Here are precious promises for those to feast freely and cheerfully upon by faith who keep the fast that God has chosen; let them know that God will make it up to them. Here is,

I. A further account of the duty to be done in order to our interest in these promises (v. 9, 10); and here, as before, it is required that we both do justly and love mercy, that we cease to do evil and learn to do well. 1. We must abstain from all acts of violence and fraud. "Those must be *taken away from the midst of thee*, from the midst of *thy person*, out of *thy heart*" (so some); "thou must not only refrain from the practice of injury, but mortify in thee all inclination and disposition towards it." Or *from the midst of thy people*. Those in authority must not only not be oppressive themselves, but must do all they can to prevent and restrain oppression in all within their jurisdiction. They must not only *break the yoke* (v. 6), but take away the yoke, that those who have been oppressed may never be re-enslaved (as they were Jer. xxxiv. 10, 11); they must likewise *forbear threatening* (Eph. vi. 9) and take away the *putting forth of the finger*, which seems to have been then, as sometimes with us, a sign of displeasure and the indication of a purpose to correct. Let not the finger be put forth to point at those that are poor and in misery, and so to expose them to contempt; such expressions of contumely as are provoking, and the products of ill-nature, ought to be banished from all societies. And let them not *speak vanity*, flattery or fraud, to one another, but let all conversation be governed by sincerity. Perhaps that dissimulation which is the bane of friendship is meant by the putting forth of the finger (as Prov. vi. 13 by *teaching with the finger*), or it is putting forth the finger with the ring on it, which was the badge of authority, and which therefore they produced when they spoke iniquity, that is, gave unrighteous sentences. 2. We must abound in all acts of charity and beneficence. We must not only give alms accord-

ing as the necessities of the poor require, but, (1.) We must give freely and cheerfully, and from a principle of charity. We must *draw out our soul to the hungry* (v. 10), not only draw out the money and reach forth the hand, but do this from the heart, heartily, and without grudging, from a principle of compassion and with a tender affection to such as we see to be in misery. Let the heart go along with the gift; for God loves a cheerful giver, and so does a poor man too. When our Lord Jesus healed and fed the multitude it was as having compassion on them. (2.) We must give plentifully and largely, so as not to tantalize, but to *satisfy, the afflicted soul*: "Do not only feed the hungry, but gratify the desire of the afflicted, and, if it lies in your power, make them easy." What are we born for, and what have we our abilities of body, mind, and estate for, but to do all the good we can in this world with them? And the poor we have always with us.

II. Here is a full account of the blessings and benefits which attend the performance of this duty. If a person, a family, a people, be thus disposed to every thing that is good, let them know for their comfort that they shall find God their bountiful rewarder and what they lay out in works of charity shall be abundantly made up to them. 1. God will surprise them with the return of mercy after great affliction, which shall be as welcome as the light of the morning after a long and dark night (v. 8): "*Then shall thy light break forth as the morning and (v. 10) thy light shall rise in obscurity*. Though thou hast been long buried alive thou shalt recover thy eminency; though long overwhelmed with grief, thou shalt again look pleasant as the dawning day." Those that are cheerful in doing good God will make cheerful in enjoying good; and this also is a special *gift of God*, Eccl. ii. 24. Those that have shown mercy shall find mercy. Job, who in his prosperity had done a great deal of good, had friends raised up for him by the Lord when he was reduced, who helped him with their substance, so that his light rose in obscurity. "Not only thy light, which is sweet, but thy health too, or the healing of the wounds thou hast long complained of, shall spring forth speedily; all thy grievances shall be redressed, and thou shalt renew thy youth and recover thy vigour." Those that have helped others out of trouble will obtain help of God when it is their turn. 2. God will put honour upon them. Good works shall be recompensed with a good name; this is included in that *light which rises out of obscurity*. Though a man's extraction be mean, his family obscure, and he has no external advantages to gain him honour, yet, if he do good in his place, that will procure him respect and veneration, and his darkness shall by this means become *as the noon-day*, that is, he shall become

very eminent and shine brightly in his generation. See here what is the surest way for a man to make himself illustrious; let him study to do good. He that would be the greatest of all, and best-beloved, let him by humility and industry make himself a servant of all. "*Thy righteousness shall then go before thee*, that is, it shall introduce thee into the esteem of many, and make thee an interest. *Thy righteousness shall answer for thee* (as Jacob says, Gen. xxx. 33), that is, it shall silence reproaches, nay, it shall bespeak thee more praises than thy humility can be pleased with." He that has *given to the poor, his righteousness* (that is, the honour of it) *endures for ever*, Ps. cxii. 9. 3. They shall always be safe under the divine protection: "*Thy righteousness shall go before thee as thy vanguard*, to secure thee from enemies that charge thee in the front, and *the glory of the Lord shall be thy rearward*, the gathering host, to bring up those of thee that are weary and are left behind, and to secure thee from the enemies, that, like Amalek, fall upon thy rear." Observe, How good people are safe on all sides. Let them look which way they will, behind them or before them; let them look backward or forward; they see themselves safe, and find themselves easy and quiet from the fear of evil. And observe what it is that is their defence; it is their righteousness, and the glory of the Lord, that is, as some suppose, Christ; for it is by him that we are justified, and God is glorified. He it is that goes before us, and is the captain of our salvation, as he is the Lord our righteousness; he it is that is our rearward, on whom alone we can depend for safety when our sins pursue us and are ready to take hold on us. Or, "God himself in his providence and grace shall both go before thee as thy guide to conduct thee, and attend thee as thy rearward to protect thee, and this shall be the reward of thy righteousness and so shall be for the glory of the Lord as the rewarder of it." 4. God will be always nigh unto them, to hear their prayers, v. 9. As, on the one hand, he that shuts his ears to the cry of the poor shall himself cry and God will not hear him; so, on the other hand, he that is liberal to the poor, his prayers shall come up with his alms for a memorial before God, as Cornelius's did (Acts x. 4): "*Then shalt thou call*, on thy fast-days, which ought to be days of prayer, *and the Lord shall answer*, shall give thee the things thou callest to him for; *thou shalt cry* when thou art in any distress or sudden fright, *and he shall say, Here I am*." This is a very condescending expression of God's readiness to hear prayer. When God calls to us by his word it becomes us to say, *Here we are; what saith our Lord unto his servants?* But that God should say to us, *Behold me, here I am*, is strange. When we cry to him, as if he were at a distance, he will let us know that he is

near, even at our right hand, nearer than we thought he was. *It is I, be not afraid* When danger is near our protector is nearer, *a very present help*. "Here I am, ready to give you what you want, and do for you what you desire; what have you to say to me?" God is attentive to the prayers of the upright, Ps. cxxx. 2. No sooner do they call to him than he answers, *Ready, ready*. Wherever they are praying, God says, "Here I am hearing; I am *in the midst of you*." He is *nigh unto them in all things*, Deut. iv. 7. 5. God will direct them in all difficult and doubtful cases (v. 11): *The Lord shall guide thee continually*. While we are here, in the wilderness of this world, we have need of continual direction from heaven; for, if at any time we be left to ourselves, we shall certainly miss our way; and therefore it is to those who are good in God's sight that he gives the wisdom which in all cases is profitable to direct, and he will be to them *instead of eyes*, Eccl. ii. 26. His providence will make their way plain to them, both what is their duty and what will be most for their comfort. 6. God will give them abundance of satisfaction in their own minds. As the world is a wilderness in respect of wanderings, so that they need to be guided continually, so also is it in respect of wants, which makes it necessary that they should have continual supplies, as Israel in the wilderness had not only the pillar of cloud to guide them continually, but manna and water out of the rock to satisfy their souls in drought, *in a dry and thirsty land where no water is*, Ps. lxxiii. 1. To a good man God gives not only wisdom and knowledge, but joy; he is satisfied in himself with the testimony of his conscience and the assurances of God's favour. "These will *satisfy thy soul*, will put gladness into thy heart, even in the drought of affliction; *these will make fat thy bones*, and fill them with marrow, will give thee that pleasure which will be a support to thee as the bones to the body, that joy of the Lord which will be thy strength. *He shall give thy bones rest*" (so some read it), "rest from the pain and sickness which they have laboured under and been chastened with;" so it agrees with that promise made to the merciful. The Lord will *make all his bed in his sickness*, Ps. xli. 3. "Thou shalt be like a watered garden, so flourishing and fruitful in graces and comforts, and like a spring of water, like a garden that has a spring of water in it, whose waters fail not either in droughts or in frosts." The principle of holy love in those that are good shall be a *well of living water*, John iv. 14. As a spring of water, though it is continually sending forth its streams, is yet always full, so the charitable man abounds in good as he abounds in doing good and is never the poorer for his liberality. He that waters shall himself be watered. 7. They and their families shall be



public blessings. It is a good reward to those that are fruitful and useful to be rendered more so, and especially to have those who descend from them to be so too. This is here promised (v. 12): "Those that now are of thee, thy princes, and nobles, and great men, shall have such authority and influence as they never had;" or, "*Those that hereafter shall be of thee*, thy posterity, shall be serviceable to their generation, as thou art to thine." It completes the satisfaction of a good man, as to this world, to think that those that come after him shall be doing good when he is gone. 1. They shall re-edify cities that have been long in ruins, *shall build the old waste places*, which had lain so long desolate that the rebuilding of them was quite despaired of. This was fulfilled when the captives, after their return, repaired the cities of Judah, and dwelt in them, and many of those in Israel too, which had lain waste ever since the carrying away of the ten tribes. 2. They shall carry on and finish that good work which was begun long before, and shall be helped over the obstructions which had retarded the progress of it: *They shall raise up* to the top that building *the foundation* of which was laid long since and has been for *many generations* in the rearing. This was fulfilled when the building of the temple was revived after it had stood still for many years, Ezra v. 2. Or, "They shall raise up foundations which shall continue for many generations yet to come;" they shall do that good which shall be of lasting consequence. 3. They shall have the blessing and praise of all about them: "*Thou shalt be called* (and it shall be to thy honour) *the repairer of the breach*, the breach made by the enemy in the wall of a besieged city, which whoso has the courage and dexterity to make up, or make good, gains great applause." Happy are those who make up the breach at which virtue is running out and judgments are breaking in. "*Thou shalt be the restorer of paths*, safe and quiet paths, not only to travel in, but to  *dwell in*, so safe and quiet that people shall make no difficulty of building their houses by the road-side." The sum is that, if they keep such fasts as God as chosen, he will settle them again in their former peace and prosperity, and there shall be none to make them afraid. See Zech. vii. 5, 9; viii. 3—5. It teaches us that those who do justly and love mercy shall have the comfort thereof in this world.

13 If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, *from* doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking *thine own* words: 14 Then shalt thou

delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

Great stress was always laid upon the due observance of the sabbath day, and it was particularly required from the Jews when they were captives in Babylon, because by keeping that day, in honour of the Creator, they distinguished themselves from the worshippers of the gods that have not made the heavens and the earth. See ch. lvi. 1, 2, where keeping the sabbath is joined, as here, with *keeping judgment* and *doing justice*. Some, indeed, understand this of the day of atonement, which they think is the fast spoken of in the former part of the chapter, and which is called a *sabbath of rest*, Lev. xxiii. 32. But, as the fasts before spoken of seem to be those that were occasional, so this sabbath is doubtless the weekly sabbath, that great sign between God and his professing people—his appointing it a sign of his favour to them and their observing it a sign of their obedience to him. Now observe here,

I. How the sabbath is to be sanctified (v. 13); and, there remaining still a sabbatism for the people of God, this law of the sabbath is still binding to us on our Lord's day.

1. Nothing must be done that puts contempt upon the sabbath day, or looks like having mean thoughts of it, when God has so highly dignified it. We must *turn away our foot from the sabbath*, from trampling upon it, as profane atheistical people do, from travelling on that day (so some); we must turn away our foot *from doing our pleasure on that holy day*, that is, from living at large, and taking a liberty to do what we please on sabbath days, without the control and restraint of conscience, or from indulging ourselves in the pleasures of sense, in which the modern Jews wickedly place the sanctification of the sabbath, though it is as great a profanation of it as any thing. On sabbath days we must not walk in *our own ways* (that is, not follow our callings), not *find our own pleasure* (that is, not follow our sports and recreations); nay, we must not *speak our own words*, words that concern either our callings or our pleasures; we must not allow ourselves a liberty of speech on that day as on other days, for we must then mind God's ways, make religion the business of the day; we must choose the things that please him; and speak his words, speak of divine things as we sit in the house and walk by the way. In all we say and do we must put a difference between this day and other days.

2. Every thing must be done that puts an honour on the day and is expressive of our high thoughts of it. We must call it a *delight*, not a *task* and a *burden*; we must delight ourselves in it, in the restraints it lays

upon us and the services it obliges us to. We must be in our element when we are worshipping God, and in communion with him. *How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!* We must not only count it a delight, but call it so, must openly profess the complacency we take in the day and the duties of it. We must call it so to God, in thanksgiving for it and earnest desire of his grace to enable us to do the work of the day in its day, because we delight in it. We must call it so to others, to invite them to come and share in the pleasure of it; and we must call it so to ourselves, that we may not entertain the least thought of wishing the sabbath gone that we may sell corn. We must call it *the Lord's holy day, and honourable*. We must call it *holy*, separated from common use and devoted to God and to his service, must call it *the holy of the Lord*, the day which he has sanctified to himself. Even in Old-Testament times the sabbath was called *the Lord's day*, and therefore it is fitly called so still, and for a further reason, because it is the *Lord Christ's day*, Rev. i. 10. It is holy because it is the Lord's day, and upon both accounts it is honourable. It is a beauty of holiness that is upon it; it is ancient, and its antiquity is its honour; and we must make it appear that we look upon it as honourable by honouring God on that day. We put honour upon the day when we give honour to him that instituted it, and to whose honour it is dedicated.

II. What the reward is of sabbath-sanctification, v. 14. If we thus remember the sabbath day to keep it holy,

1. We shall have the comfort of it; the work will be its own wages. *If we call the sabbath a delight, then shall we delight ourselves in the Lord*; he will more and more manifest himself to us as the delightful subject of our thoughts and meditations and the delightful object of our best affections. Note, The more pleasure we take in serving God the more pleasure we shall find in it. If we go about duty with cheerfulness, we shall go from it with satisfaction and shall have reason to say, "It is good to be here, good to draw near to God."

2. We shall have the honour of it: *I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth*, which denotes not only a great security (as that, ch. xxxiii. 16, *He shall dwell on high*), but great dignity and advancement. "Thou shalt ride in state, shalt appear conspicuous, and the eyes of all thy neighbours shall be upon thee." It was said of Israel, when God led them triumphantly out of Egypt, that *he made them to ride on the high places of the earth*, Deut. xxxii. 12, 13. Those that honour God and his sabbath he will thus honour. If God by his grace enable us to live above the world, and so to manage it as not only not to be hindered by it, but to be furthered and carried on by it in our journey towards heaven, then

he makes us to ride on the high places of the earth.

3. We shall have the profit of it: *I will feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father*, that is, with all the blessings of the covenant and all the precious products of Canaan (which was a type of heaven), for these were the heritage of Jacob. Observe, The heritage of believers is what they shall not only be portioned with hereafter, but fed with now, fed with the hopes of it, and not flattered, fed with the earnest and foretastes of it; and those that are so fed have reason to say that they are well fed. In order that we may depend upon it, it is added, "*The mouth of the Lord has spoken it*"; you may take God's word for it, for he cannot lie nor deceive; what his mouth has spoken his hand will give, his hand will do, and not one iota or tittle of his good promise shall fall to the ground." *Blessed, therefore, thrice blessed, is he that doeth this, and lays hold on it, that keeps the sabbath from polluting it.*

#### CHAP. LIX.

In this chapter we have sin appearing exceedingly sinful, and grace appearing exceedingly gracious; and, as what is here said of the sinner's sin (ver. 7, 8) is applied to the general corruption of mankind (Rom. iii. 15), so what is here said of a Redeemer (ver. 20) is applied to Christ, Rom. xi. 23. I. It is here charged upon this people that they had themselves stopped the current of God's favours to them, and the particular sins are specified which kept good things from them, ver. 1-6. II. It is here charged upon them that they had themselves procured the judgments of God upon them, and they are told both what the judgments were which they had brought upon their own heads (ver. 9-11) and what the sins were which provoked God to send those judgments, ver. 12-15. III. It is here promised that, notwithstanding this, God would work deliverance for them, purely for his own name's sake (ver. 16-19), and would reserve mercy in store for them and avert it upon them, ver. 20, 21.

**B**EHOLD, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: 2 But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid *his* face from you, that he will not hear. 3 For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness. 4 None calleth for justice, nor *any* pleadeth for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity. 5 They hatch cockatrice eggs, and weave the spider's web: he that eateth of their eggs dieth, and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper. 6 Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works: their works *are* works of iniquity, and the act of violence *is* in their hands. 7 Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts *are* thoughts of ini-



quity; wasting and destruction *are* in their paths. 8 The way of peace they know not; and *there is* no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace.

The prophet here rectifies the mistake of those who had been quarrelling with God because they had not the deliverances wrought for them which they had been often fasting and praying for, *ch. lviii. 3.* Now here he shows,

I. That it was not owing to God. They had no reason to lay the fault upon him that they were not saved out of the hands of their enemies; for, 1. He was still as able to help as ever: *His hand is not shortened*, his power is not at all lessened, straitened, or abridged. Whether we consider the extent of his power or the efficacy of it, God can reach as far as ever and with as strong a hand as ever. Note, The church's salvation comes from the hand of God, and that has not waxed weak nor is it at all shortened. *Has the Lord's hand waxed short?* (says God to Moses, Num. xi. 23). No, it has not; he will not have it thought so. Neither length of time nor strength of enemies, no, nor weakness of instruments, can shorten or straiten the power of God, with which it is all one to save by many or by few. 2. He was still as ready and willing to help as ever in answer to prayer: *His ear is not heavy, that it cannot hear.* Though he has many prayers to hear and answer, and though he has been long hearing prayer, yet he is still as ready to hear prayer as ever. The prayer of the upright is as much his delight as ever it was, and the promises which are pleaded and put in suit in prayer are still yea and amen, inviolably sure. More is implied than is expressed; not only his ear is not heavy, but he is quick of hearing. *Even before they call he answers, ch. lxxv. 24.* If your prayers be not answered, and the salvation we wait for be not wrought for us, it is not because God is weary of hearing prayer, but because we are weary of praying, not because his ear is heavy when we speak to him, but because our ears are heavy when he speaks to us.

II. That it was owing to themselves; they stood in their own light and put a bar in their own door. God was coming towards them in ways of mercy and they hindered him. *Your iniquities have kept good things from you, Jer. v. 25.*

1. See what mischief sin does. (1.) It hinders God's mercies from coming down upon us; it is a partition wall that separates between us and God. Notwithstanding the infinite distance that is between God and man by nature, there was a correspondence settled between them, till sin set them at variance, justly provoked God against man

and unjustly alienated man from God; thus it *separates between them and God.* "He is your God, yours in profession, and therefore there is so much the more malignity and mischievousness in sin, which separates between you and him." Sin *hides his face from us* (which denotes great displeasure, Deut. xxxi. 17); it provokes him in anger to withdraw his gracious presence, to suspend the tokens of his favour and the instances of his help; he hides his face, as refusing to be seen or spoken with. See here sin in its colours, sin exceedingly sinful, withdrawing the creature from his allegiance to his Creator; and see sin in its consequences, sin exceedingly hurtful, separating us from God, and so separating us not only *from all good*, but to *all evil* (Deut. xxix. 21), which is the very quintessence of the curse. (2.) It hinders our prayers from coming up unto God; it provokes him to hide his face, that he will not hear, as he has said, *ch. i. 15.* If we *regard iniquity in our heart*, if we indulge it and allow ourselves in it, God *will not hear our prayers*, Ps. lxxvi. 18. We cannot expect that he should countenance us while we go on to affront him.

2. Now, to justify God in hiding his face from them, and proceeding in his controversy with them, the prophet shows very largely, in the following verses, how many and great their iniquities were, according to the charge given him (*ch. lviii. 1*), *to show God's people their transgressions*; and it is a black bill of indictment that is here drawn up against them, consisting of many particulars, any one of which was enough to separate between them and a just and a holy God. Let us endeavour to reduce these articles of impeachment to proper heads.

(1.) We must begin with their thoughts, for there all sin begins, and thence it takes its rise: *Their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity, v. 7.* Their imaginations are so, only evil continually. Their projects and designs are so; they are continually contriving some mischief or other, and how to compass the gratification of some base lust (*v. 4*): *They conceive mischief* in their fancy, purpose, counsel, and resolution (thus the embryo receives its shape and life), and then they *bring forth iniquity*, put it in execution when it is ripened for it. Though it is in pain perhaps that the iniquity is brought forth, through the oppositions of Providence and the checks of their own consciences, yet, when they have compassed their wicked purpose, they look upon it with as much pride and pleasure as if it were a *man-child born into the world*; thus, *when lust has conceived, it bringeth forth sin, Jam. i. 15.* This is called (*v. 5*) *hatching the cockatrice' egg and weaving the spider's web.* See how the thoughts and contrivances of wicked men are employed, and about what they set their wits on work. [1.] At the best it is about that which is foolish and frivolous. Their

thoughts are vain, like weaving the spider's web, which the poor silly animal takes a great deal of pains about, and, when all is done, it is a weak insignificant thing, a reproach to the place where it is, and which the besom sweeps away in an instant: such are the thoughts which worldly men entertain themselves with, building castles in the air, and pleasing themselves with imaginary satisfaction, like the *spider*, which *takes hold with her hands* very finely (Prov. xxx. 28). but cannot keep her hold. [2.] Too often it is about that which is malicious and spiteful. They hatch the eggs of the cockatrice or adder, which are poisonous and produce venomous creatures; such are the thoughts of the wicked who delight in doing mischief. *He that eats of their eggs* (that is, has any dealings with them) *dies* (that is, he is in danger of having some mischief or other done him), *and that which is crushed* in order to be eaten of, or which begins to be hatched and you promise yourself some useful fowl from it, *breaks out into a viper*, which you meddle with at your peril. Happy are those that have least to do with such men. Even the spider's web which they wove was woven with a spiteful design to catch flies in and make a prey of them; for, rather than not be doing mischief, they will play at small game.

(2.) Out of this abundance of wickedness in the heart their mouth speaks, and yet it does not always speak out the wickedness that is within, but, for the more effectually compassing the mischievous design, it is dissembled and covered *with much fair speech* (v. 3): *Your lips have spoken lies*; and again (v. 4), *They speak lies*, pretending kindness where they intend the greatest mischief; or by slanders and false accusations they blasted the credit and reputation of those they had a spite to and so did them a real mischief unseen, and perhaps by suborning witnesses against them took from them their estates and lives; for a false tongue is sharp arrows, and coals of juniper, and every thing that is mischievous. *Your tongue has muttered perverseness*. When they could not, for shame, speak their malice against their neighbours aloud, or durst not, for fear of being disproved and put to confusion, they muttered it secretly. Backbiters are called *whisperers*.

(3.) Their actions were all of a piece with their thoughts and words. They were guilty of shedding innocent blood, a crime of the most heinous nature: *Your hands are defiled with blood* (v. 3); for blood is defiling; it leaves an indelible stain of guilt upon the conscience, which nothing but the blood of Christ can cleanse it from. Nor was this a case of surprise, or one that occurred when there was something of a force put upon them; but (v. 7) *their feet ran to this evil*, naturally and eagerly, and, hurried on by the *impetus* of their malice and revenge, *they made haste to shed innocent blood*, as if they were afraid of losing an opportunity to do a

barbarous thing, Prov. i. 16; Jer. xxii. 17. *Wasting and destruction are in their paths*. Wherever they go they carry mischief along with them, and the tendency of their way is to lay waste and destroy, nor do they care what havoc they make. Nor do they only thirst after blood, but with other iniquities are their *fingers defiled* (v. 3); they wrong people in their estates and make every thing their own that they can lay their hands on. *They trust in vanity* (v. 4); they depend upon their arts of cozenage to enrich themselves with, which will prove vanity to them, and their deceiving others will but deceive themselves. *Their works*, which they take so much pains about and have their hearts so much upon, *are all works of iniquity*; their whole business is one continued course of oppressions and vexations, *and the act of violence is in their hands*, according to the arts of violence that are in their heads and the thoughts of violence in their hearts.

(4.) No methods are taken to redress these grievances and reform these abuses (v. 4): *None calls for justice*, none complains of the violation of the sacred laws of justice, nor seeks to right those that suffer wrong or to get the laws put in execution against vice and profaneness, and those lewd practices which are the shame, and threaten to be the bane, of the nation. Note, When justice is not done there is blame to be laid not only upon the magistrates that should administer justice, but upon the people that should call for it. Private persons ought to contribute to the public good by discovering secret wickedness, and giving those an opportunity to punish it that have the power of doing so in their hands; but it is ill with a state when princes rule ill and the people love to have it so. Truth is opposed, and there is not any that *pleads for it*, not any that has the conscience and courage to appear in defence of an honest cause, and confront a prosperous fraud and wrong. *The way of peace* is as little regarded as the way of truth; they *know it not*, that is, they never study the things that make for peace, no care is taken to prevent or punish the breaches of the peace and to accommodate matters in difference among neighbours; they are utter strangers to every thing that looks quiet and peaceable, and affect that which is blustering and turbulent. *There is no judgment in their goings*; they have not any sense of justice in their dealings; it is a thing they make no account of at all, but can easily break through all its fences if they stand in the way of their malicious covetous designs.

(5.) In all this they act foolishly, very foolishly, and as much against their interest as against reason and equity. Those that practise iniquity *trust in vanity*, which will certainly deceive them, v. 4. *Their webs*, which they weave with so much art and industry, *shall not become garments, neither*



*shall they cover themselves, either for shelter or for ornament, with their works, v. 6. They may do hurt to others with their projects, but can never do any real service or kindness to themselves by them. There is nothing to be got by sin, and so it will appear when profit and loss come to be compared. Those paths of iniquity are crooked paths (v. 8), which will perplex them, but will never bring them to their journey's end; whoever go therein, though they say that they shall have peace notwithstanding they go on, deceive themselves; for they shall not know peace, as appears by the following verses.*

9 Therefore is judgment far from us, neither doth justice overtake us: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, *but* we walk in darkness. 10 We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if *we had* no eyes: we stumble at noon-day as in the night; *we are* in desolate places as dead *men*. 11 We roar all like bears, and mourn sore like doves: we look for judgment, but *there is* none; for salvation, *but* it is far off from us. 12 For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us: for our transgressions *are* with us; and *as for* our iniquities, we know them; 13 In transgressing and lying against the LORD, and departing away from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood. 14 And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. 15 Yea, truth faileth; and he *that* departeth from evil maketh himself a prey: and the LORD saw *it*, and it displeased him that *there was* no judgment.

The scope of this paragraph is the same with that of the last, to show that sin is the great mischief-maker; as it is that which keeps good things from us, so it is that which brings evil things upon us. But as *there* it is spoken by the prophet, in God's name, to the people, for their conviction and humiliation, and that God might be justified when he speaks and clear when he judges, so *here* it seems to be spoken by the people to God, as an acknowledgment of that which was there told them and an expression of their humble submission and subscription to the justice and equity of God's proceedings against them. Their uncircumcised hearts here seem to be humbled in some measure,

and they are brought to confess (the confession is at least extorted from them) that God had justly walked contrary to them, because they had walked contrary to him.

1. They acknowledge that God had contended with them and had walked contrary to them. Their case was very deplorable, v. 9—11. 1. They were in distress, trampled upon and oppressed by their enemies, unjustly dealt with, and ruled with rigour; and God did not appear for them, to plead their just and injured cause: "*Judgment is far from us, neither does justice overtake us, v. 9. Though, as to our persecutors, we are sure that we have right on our side, and they are the wrong-doers, yet we are not relieved, we are not righted. We have not done justice to one another, and therefore God suffers our enemies to deal thus unjustly with us, and we are as far as ever from being restored to our right and recovering our property again. Oppression is near us, and judgment is far from us. Our enemies are far from giving our case its due consideration, but still hurry us on with the violence of their oppressions, and justice does not overtake us, to rescue us out of their hands.*"

2. Herein their expectations were sadly disappointed, which made their case the more sad: "*We wait for light as those that wait for the morning, but behold obscurity; we cannot discern the least dawning of the day of our deliverance. We look for judgment, but there is none (v. 11); neither God nor man appears for our succour; we look for salvation, because God (we think) has promised it, and we have prayed for it with fasting; we look for it as for brightness, but it is far off from us, as far off as ever for aught we can perceive, and still we walk in darkness; and the higher our expectations have been raised the sorer is the disappointment.*" 3. They were quite at a loss what to do to help themselves and were at their wits' end (v. 10): "*We grope for the wall like the blind; we see no way open for our relief, nor know which way to expect it, or what to do in order to it.*" If we shut our eyes against the light of divine truth, it is just with God to hide from our eyes the things that belong to our peace; and, if we use not our eyes as we should, it is just with him to let us be as if we had no eyes. Those that will not see their duty shall not see their interest. Those whom God has given up to a judicial blindness are strangely infatuated; they stumble at noon-day as in the night; they see not either those dangers, or those advantages, which all about them see. *Quos Deus vult perdere, eos dementat—God infatuates those whom he means to destroy.* Those that love darkness rather than light shall have their doom accordingly. 4. They sunk into despair and were quite overwhelmed with grief, the marks of which appeared in every man's countenance; they grew melancholy upon it, shunned conversation, and

affected solitude: *We are in desolate places as dead men.* The state of the Jews in Babylon is represented by *dead and dry bones* (Ezek. xxxvii. 12) and the explanation of the comparison there (v. 11) explains this text: *Our hope is lost; we are cut off for our parts.* In this despair the sorrow and anguish of some were loud and noisy: *We roar like bears;* the sorrow of others was silent, and preyed more upon their spirits: *"We mourn sore like doves, like doves of the valleys; we mourn both for our iniquities (Ezek. vii. 16) and for our calamities."* Thus they owned that *the hand of the Lord had gone out against them.*

II. They acknowledge that they had provoked God thus to contend with them, that he had done right, for they had done wickedly, v. 12—15. 1. They owned that they had sinned, and that to this day they were in a great trespass, as Ezra speaks (Ezra x. 10): *"Our transgressions are with us; the guilt of them is upon us, the power of them prevails among us, we are not yet reformed, nor have we parted with our sins, though they have done us so much mischief. Nay, our transgressions are multiplied; they are more numerous and more heinous than they have been formerly. Look which way we will, we cannot look off them; all places, all orders and degrees of men, are infected. The sense of our transgression is with us, as David said, My sin is ever before me; it is too plain to be denied or concealed, too bad to be excused or palliated. God is a witness to them: They are multiplied before thee, in thy sight, under thy eye. We are witnesses against ourselves: As for our iniquities, we know them, though we may have foolishly endeavoured to cover them. Nay, they themselves are witnesses: Our sins stare us in the face and testify against us, so many have they been and so deeply aggravated."* 2. They owned the great evil and malignity of sin, of their sin; it is *transgressing and lying against the Lord*, v. 13. The sins of those that profess themselves God's people, and bear his name, are upon *this* account worse than the sins of others, that in transgressing they *lie against the Lord*, they falsely accuse him, they misrepresent and belie him, as if he had dealt hardly and unfairly with them; or they perfidiously break covenant with him and falsify their most sacred and solemn engagements to him, which is *lying against him: it is departing away from our God*, to whom we are bound as our God and to whom we ought to cleave with purpose of heart; from him we have departed, as the rebellious subject from his allegiance to his rightful prince, and the adulterous wife from the guide of her youth and the covenant of her God. 3. They owned that there was a general decay of moral honesty; and it is not strange that those who were false to their God were unfaithful to one another. They *spoke oppression*, declared openly for that,

though it was a revolt from their God and a revolt from truth, by the sacred bonds of which we should always be tied and held fast. They *conceived and uttered words of falsehood.* Many an ill thing is conceived in the mind, yet is prudently stifled there, and not suffered to go any further; but these sinners were so impudent, so daring, that whatever wickedness they conceived, they gave it an *imprimatur*—a sanction, and made no difficulty of publishing it. To think an ill thing is bad, but to say it is much worse. Many a word of falsehood is uttered in haste, for want of consideration; but these were conceived and uttered, were uttered deliberately and of malice prepense. They were words of falsehood, and yet they are said to be uttered *from the heart*, because, though they differed from the real sentiments of the heart and therefore were words of falsehood, yet they agreed with the malice and wickedness of the heart, and were the natural language of that; it was a *double heart*, Ps. xii. 2. Those who by the grace of God kept themselves free from these enormous crimes yet put themselves into the confession of sin, because members of that nation which was generally thus corrupted. 4. They owned that that was not done which might have been done to reform the land and to amend what was amiss, v. 14. *"Judgment, that should go forward, and bear down the opposition that is made to it, that should run in its course like a river, like a mighty stream, is turned away backward, a contrary course.* The administration of justice has become but a cover to the greatest injustice. Judgment, that should check the proceedings of fraud and violence, is driven back, and so they go on triumphantly. *Justice stands afar off*, even from our courts of judicature, which are so crowded with the patrons of oppression that *equity cannot enter*, cannot have admission into the court, cannot be heard, or at least will not be heeded. Equity enters not into the unrighteous decrees which they decree, ch. x. 1. *Truth is fallen in the street*, and there she may lie to be trampled upon by every foot of pride, and she has never a friend that will lend a hand to help her up; *yea, truth fails* in common conversation, and in dealings between man and man, so that one knows not whom to believe nor whom to trust." 5. They owned that there was a prevailing enmity in men's minds to those that were good: *He that does evil goes unpunished*, but *he that departs from evil makes himself a prey* to those beasts of prey that were before described. It is crime enough with them for a man not to do as they do, and they treat *him* as an enemy who will not partake with them in their wickedness. *He that departs from evil is accounted mad*; so the margin reads. Sober singularity is branded as folly, and he is thought next door to a madman who swims against the stream that runs so strongly. 6. They



owned that all this could not but be very displeasing to the God of heaven. The evil was done in his sight. They knew very well, though they were not willing to acknowledge it, that the Lord saw it; though it was done secretly, and gilded over with specious pretences, yet it could not be concealed from his all-seeing eye. All the wickedness that is in the world is naked and open before the eyes of God; and, as he is of quicker eyes than not to see iniquity, so he is of purer eyes than to behold it with the least approbation or allowance. *He saw it, and it displeased him*, though it was among his own professing people that he saw it. It was evil in his eyes; he saw the sinfulness of all this sin, and that which was most offensive to him was *that there was no judgment*, no reformation; had he seen any signs of repentance, though the sin displeased him, he would soon have been reconciled to the sinners upon their returning from their evil way. *Then* the sin of a nation becomes national, and brings public judgments, when it is not restrained by public justice.

16 And he saw that *there was* no man, and wondered that *there was* no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him. 17 For he put on righteousness as a breast-plate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak. 18 According to *their* deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompence to his enemies; to the islands he will repay recompence. 19 So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him. 20 And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD. 21 As for me, this *is* my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My Spirit that *is* upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever.

How sin abounded we have read, to our great amazement, in the former part of the chapter; how grace does much more abound

we read in these verses. And, as sin took occasion from the commandment to become more exceedingly sinful, so grace took occasion from the transgression of the commandment to appear more exceedingly gracious. Observe,

1. Why God wrought salvation for this provoking people, notwithstanding their provocations. It was purely for his own name's sake; because there was nothing in them either to bring it about, or to induce him to bring it about for them, no merit to deserve it, no might to effect it, he would do it himself, would be exalted in his own strength, for his own glory.

1. He took notice of their weakness and wickedness: *He saw that there was no man* that would do any thing for the support of the bleeding cause of religion and virtue among them, not a man that would execute judgment (Jer. v. 1), that would bestir himself in a work of reformation; those that complained of the badness of the times had not zeal and courage enough to appear and act against it; there was a universal corruption of manners, and nothing done to stem the tide; most were wicked, and those that were not so were yet weak, and durst not attempt any thing in opposition to the wickedness of the wicked. *There was no intercessor*, either none to intercede with God, to stand in the gap by prayer to turn away his wrath (it would have pleased him to be thus met, and he wondered that he was not), or, rather, none to interpose for the support of justice and truth, which were trampled upon and run down (v. 14), no advocate to speak a good word for those who were made a prey of because they kept their integrity, v. 15. They complained that God did not appear for them (ch. lviii. 3); but God with much more reason complains that they did nothing for themselves, intimating how ready he would have been to do them good if he had found among them the least motion towards a reformation.

2. He engaged his own strength and righteousness for them. They shall be saved, notwithstanding all this; and, (1.) Because they have no strength of their own, nor any active men that will set to it in good earnest to redress the grievances either of their iniquities or of their calamities, *therefore his own arm shall bring salvation to him*, to his people, or to him whom he would raise up to be the deliverer, Christ, the power of God and arm of the Lord, that man of his right hand whom he made strong for himself. The work of reformation (that is the first and principal article of the salvation) shall be wrought by the immediate influences of the divine grace on men's consciences. Since magistrates and societies for reformation fail of doing their part, one will not do justice nor the other call for it, God will let them know that he can do it without them when his time shall come thus to prepare his peo-

ple for mercy, and then the work of deliverance shall be wrought by the immediate operations of the divine Providence on men's affections and affairs. When God stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, and brought his people out of Babylon, *not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts*, then his own arm, which is never shortened, brought salvation. (2.) Because they have no righteousness of their own to merit these favours, and to which God might have an eye in working for them, therefore *his own righteousness sustained him* and bore him out in it. Divine justice, which by their sins they had armed against them, through grace appears for them. Though they can expect no favour as due to them, yet he will be just to himself, to his own purpose and promise, and covenant with his people: he will, in righteousness, punish the enemies of his people; see Deut. ix. 5. *Not for thy righteousness, but for the wickedness of these nations* they are driven out. In our redemption by Christ, since we had no righteousness of our own to produce, on which God might proceed in favour to us, he brought in a righteousness by the merit and mediation of his own Son (it is called *the righteousness which is of God by faith*, Phil. iii. 9), and this righteousness sustained him, and bore him out in all his favours to us, notwithstanding our provocations. *He put on righteousness as a breast-plate*, securing his own honour, as a breast-plate does the vitals, in all his proceedings, by the justice and equity of them; and then he put a *helmet of salvation upon his head*; so sure is he to effect the salvation he intends that he takes salvation itself for his helmet, which therefore must needs be impenetrable, and in which he appears very illustrious, formidable in the eyes of his enemies and amiable in the eyes of his friends. When righteousness is his coat of arms, salvation is his crest. In allusion to this, among the pieces of a Christian's armour we find *the breast-plate of righteousness*, and for a helmet *the hope of salvation* (Eph. vi. 14—17; 1 Thess. v. 8), and it is called *the armour of God*, because he wore it first and so fitted it for us. (3.) Because they have no spirit or zeal to do any thing for themselves, God will *put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and clothe himself with zeal as a cloak*; he will make his justice upon the enemies of his church and people, and his jealousy for his own glory and the honour of religion and virtue among men, to appear evident and conspicuous in the eye of the world; and in these he will show himself great, as a man shows himself in his rich attire or in the distinguishing habit of his office. If men be not zealous against sin, God will, and will take vengeance on it for all the injury it has done to his honour and his people's welfare; and this was the business of Christ in the world, to take away sin and be revenged on it.

II. What the salvation is that shall be wrought out by the righteousness and strength of God himself.

1. There shall be a present temporal salvation wrought out for the Jews in Babylon, or elsewhere in distress and captivity. This is promised (v. 18, 19) as a type of something further. When God's time shall come he will do his own work, though those fail that should forward it. It is here promised, (1.) That God will reckon with his enemies and will render to them according to their deeds, to the enemies of his people abroad, that have oppressed them, to the enemies of justice and truth at home, that have oppressed them, for they also are God's enemies; and, when the day of vengeance shall have come, he will deal with both as they have deserved, *according to retribution* (so the word is), the law of retributions (Rev. xiii. 10), or *according to former retributions*; as he has rendered to his enemies formerly, accordingly he will now repay, *fury to his adversaries, recompence to his enemies*; his fury shall not exceed the rules of justice, as men's fury commonly does. Even *to the islands*, that lie most remote, if they have appeared against him, *he will repay recompence*; for *his hand shall find out all his enemies* (Ps. xxi. 8), and his arrows reach them. Though God's people have behaved so ill that they do not deserve to be delivered, yet his enemies behave so much worse that they do deserve to be destroyed. (2.) That, whatever attempts the enemies of God's people may afterwards make upon them to disturb their peace, they shall be baffled and brought to nought: *When the enemy shall come in like a flood*, like a high spring-tide, or a land-flood, which threaten to bear down all before them without control, then *the Spirit of the Lord* by some secret undiscerned power *shall lift up a standard against him*, and so (as the margin reads it) *put him to flight*. He that has delivered will still deliver. When God's people are weak and helpless, and have no standard to lift up against the invading power, God will *give a banner to those that fear him* (Ps. lx. 4), will by his Spirit lift up a standard, which will draw multitudes together to appear on the church's behalf. Some read it, *He shall come* (the name of the Lord, and his glory, before foreseen of the Messiah promised) *like a straight river, the Spirit of the Lord lifting him up for an ensign*. Christ by the preaching of his gospel shall cover the earth with the knowledge of God as with the waters of a flood, the *Spirit of the Lord* setting up Christ as a *standard to the Gentiles*, ch. xi. 10. (3.) That all this should redound to the glory of God and the advancement of religion in the world (v. 19): *So shall they fear the name of the Lord and his glory* in all nations that lie eastward or westward. The deliverance of the Jews out of captivity, and the destruction brought on their oppressors, would awaken multitudes to enquire



concerning the God of Israel, and induce them to serve and worship him and enlist themselves under the standard which the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up. God's appearances for his church shall occasion the accession of many to it. This had its full accomplishment in gospel times, when many came from the east and west, to fill up the places of the children of the kingdom that were cast out, when there were set up eastern and western churches, Matt. viii. 11.

2. There shall be a more glorious salvation wrought out by the Messiah in the fulness of time, which salvation all the prophets, upon all occasions, had in view. We have here the two great promises relating to that salvation:—

(1.) That the Son of God shall come to us to be our Redeemer (v. 20): *Thy Redeemer shall come*; it is applied to Christ, Rom. xi. 26. *There shall come the deliverer*. The coming of Christ as the Redeemer is the summary of all the promises both of the Old and New Testament, and this was the redemption in Jerusalem which the believing Jews looked for, Luke ii. 38. Christ is our *Goel*, our next kinsman, that redeems both the person and the estate of the poor debtor. Observe, [1.] The place where this Redeemer shall appear: *He shall come to Zion*, for there, on that holy hill, the Lord would set him up as his King, Ps. ii. 6. In Zion the chief corner-stone was to be laid, 1 Pet. ii. 6. He came to his temple there, Mal. iii. 1. There salvation was to be placed (ch. xlv. 13), for thence the law was to go forth, ch. ii. 3. Zion was a type of the gospel church, for which the Redeemer acts in all his appearances: *The Redeemer shall come for the sake of Zion*; so the LXX. read it. [2.] The persons that shall have the comfort of the Redeemer's coming, that shall then lift up their heads, knowing that their redemption draws nigh. He shall come to those that turn from ungodliness in Jacob, to those that are in Jacob, to the praying seed of Jacob, in answer to their prayers; yet not to all that are in Jacob, that are within the pale of the visible church, but to those only that turn from transgression, that repent, and reform, and forsake those sins which Christ came to redeem them from. The sinners in Zion will fare never the better for the Redeemer's coming to Zion if they go on still in their trespasses.

(2.) That the Spirit of God shall come to us to be our sanctifier, v. 21. In the Redeemer there was a new covenant made with us a covenant of promises; and this is the great and comprehensive promise of that covenant, that God will give and continue his word and Spirit to his church and people throughout all generations. God's giving the Spirit to those that ask him includes the giving of them all good things, Luke xi. 13; Matt. vii. 11. This covenant is here said to be made with them, that is, with those that turn

from transgression; for those that cease to do evil shall be taught to do well. But the promise is made to a single person—*My Spirit that is upon thee*, being directed either, [1.] To Christ as the head of the church, who received that he might give. The Spirit promised to the church was first upon him, and from his head that precious ointment descended to the skirts of his garments; and the word of the gospel was first put into his mouth; for it began to be spoken by the Lord. And all believers are his seed, in whom he prolongs his days, ch. liii. 10. Or, [2.] To the church; and so it is a promise of the continuance and perpetuity of the church in the world to the end of time, parallel to those promises that the throne and seed of Christ shall endure for ever, Ps. lxxxix. 29, 36; xxii. 30. Observe, First, How the church shall be kept up, in a succession, as the world of mankind is kept up, by the seed and the seed's seed. As one generation passes away another generation shall come. *Instead of the fathers shall be the children*. Secondly, How long it shall be kept up—*henceforth and for ever*, always, even unto the end of the world; for, the world being left to stand for the sake of the church, we may be sure that as long as it does stand Christ will have a church in it, though not always visible. Thirdly, By what means it shall be kept up; by the constant residence of the word and Spirit in it. 1. The Spirit that was upon Christ shall always continue in the hearts of the faithful; there shall be some in every age on whom he shall work, and in whom he shall dwell, and thus the Comforter shall abide with the church for ever, John xiv. 16. 2. The word of Christ shall always continue in the mouths of the faithful; there shall be some in every age who, believing with the heart unto righteousness, shall with the tongue make confession unto salvation. The word shall never depart out of the mouth of the church; for there shall still be a seed to speak Christ's holy language and profess his holy religion. Observe, The Spirit and the word go together, and by them the church is kept up. For the word in the mouths of our ministers, nay, the word in our own mouths, will not profit us, unless the Spirit work with the word, and give us an understanding. But the Spirit does his work by the word and in concurrence with it; and whatever is pretended to be a dictate of the Spirit must be tried by the scriptures. On these foundations the church is built, stands firmly, and shall stand for ever, Christ himself being the chief corner-stone.

#### CHAP. LX.

This whole chapter is all to the same purpose, all in the same strain; it is a part of God's covenant with his church, which is spoken of in the last verse of the foregoing chapter, and the blessings here promised are the fruits of the word and Spirit there promised. The long continuance of the church, even unto the utmost ages of time, was there promised, and here the large extent of the church, even unto the utmost regions of the earth; and both these tend to the honour of the Redeemer. It is here promised, 1. That the church shall be enlightened and shone upon, ver. 1, 2. 2. That it shall

be enlarged and great additions made to it, to join in the service of God, ver. 3—5. III. That the new converts shall be greatly serviceable to the church and to the interests of it, ver. 9—13. IV. That the church shall be in great honour and reputation among men, ver. 14—16. V. That it shall enjoy a profound peace and tranquillity, ver. 17, 18. VI. That the members of it being all righteous, the glory and joy of it shall be everlasting, ver. 19—22. Now this has some reference to the peaceable and prosperous condition which the Jews were sometimes in after their return out of captivity into their own land; but it certainly looks further, and was to have its full accomplishment in the kingdom of the Messiah, the enlargement of that kingdom by the bringing in of the Gentiles into it, and the spiritual blessings in heavenly things by Christ Jesus with which it should be enriched, and all these earnest of eternal joy and glory.

**ARISE**, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. 2 For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. 3 And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. 4 Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side. 5 Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee. 6 The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall show forth the praises of the LORD. 7 All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto thee: they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory. 8 Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?

It is here promised that the gospel temple shall be very lightsome and very large.

I. It shall be very lightsome: *Thy light has come*. When the Jews returned out of captivity they had *light and gladness, and joy and honour*; they then were made to *know the Lord and to rejoice in his great goodness*; and upon both accounts their light came. When the Redeemer came to Zion he brought light with him, he himself came to be a light. Now observe, 1. What this light is, and whence it springs: *The Lord shall arise upon thee (v. 2), the glory of the Lord (v. 1) shall be seen upon thee*. God is the father and fountain of lights, and it is in his light that we shall see light. As

far as we have the knowledge of God in us, and the favour of God towards us, our light has come. When God appears to us, and we have the comfort of his favour, then *the glory of the Lord rises upon us* as the morning light; when he appears for us, and we have the credit of his favour, when he shows us some token for good and proclaims his favour to us, then his glory is seen upon us, as it was upon Israel in the *pillar of cloud and fire*. When Christ arose as the sun of righteousness, and in him the *day-spring from on high visited us*, then *the glory of the Lord* was seen upon us, the *glory as of the first-begotten of the Father*. 2. What a foil there shall be to this light: *Darkness shall cover the earth*; but, though it be gross darkness, darkness that might be felt, like that of Egypt, that shall overspread the people, yet the church, like Goshen, shall have light at the same time. When the case of the nations that have not the gospel shall be very melancholy, those *dark corners of the earth* being *full of the habitations of cruelty* to poor souls, the state of the church shall be very pleasant. 3. What is the duty which the rising of this light calls for: “*Arise, shine*; not only receive this light, and” (as the margin reads it) “*be enlightened by it*, but reflect this light; *arise and shine* with rays borrowed from it.” The children of light ought to shine as lights in the world. If God’s glory be seen upon us to our honour, we ought not only with our lips, but in our lives, to return the praise of it to his honour, Matt. v. 16; Phil. ii. 15.

II. It shall be very large. When the Jews were settled again in their own land, after their captivity, many of the people of the land joined themselves to them; but it does not appear that there ever was any such numerous accession to them as would answer the fulness of this prophecy; and therefore we must conclude that this looks further, to the bringing of the Gentiles into the gospel church, not their flocking to one particular place, though under that type it is here described. There is no place now that is the centre of the church’s unity; but the promise respects their flocking to Christ, and coming by faith, and hope, and holy love, into that society which is incorporated by the charter of his gospel, and of the unity of which he only is the centre—that family which is named from him, Eph. iii. 15. The gospel church is expressly called *Zion* and *Jerusalem*, and under that notion all believers are said to come to it (Heb. xii. 22, *You have come unto Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem*), which serves for a key to this prophecy, Eph. ii. 19. Observe,

1. What shall invite such multitudes to the church: “*They shall come to thy light and to the brightness of thy rising, v. 3. They shall be allured to join themselves to thee*,” (1.) “*By the light that shines upon*



thee," the light of the glorious gospel, which the churches hold forth, in consequence of which they are called *golden candlesticks*. This light which discovers so much of God and his good will to man, by which life and immortality are brought to light, this shall invite all the serious well-affected part of mankind to come and join themselves to the church, that they may have the benefit of this light to inform them concerning truth and duty. (2.) "By the light with which thou shinest." The purity and love of the primitive Christians, their heavenly-mindedness, contempt of the world, and patient sufferings, were the brightness of the church's rising, which drew many into it. The beauty of holiness was the powerful attractive by which Christ had a willing people brought to him in the day of his power, Ps. cx. 3.

2. What multitudes shall come to the church. Great numbers *shall come, Gentiles (or nations) of those that are saved*, as it is expressed with allusion to this, Rev. xxi. 24. *Nations shall be discipled* (Matt. xxviii. 19), and even kings, men of figure, power, and influence, shall be *added to the church*. They come from all parts (v. 4): *Lift up thy eyes round about, and see them coming, devout men out of every nation under heaven*, Acts ii. 5. See how *white the fields are already to the harvest*, John iv. 35. See them coming in a body, as one man, and with one consent: *They gather themselves together*, that they may strengthen one another's hands, and encourage one another. *Come, and let us go*, ch. ii. 3. "They come from the remotest parts: *They come to thee from far, having heard the report of thee*, as the queen of Sheba, or *seen thy star in the east*, as the wise men, and they will not be discouraged by the length of the journey from coming to thee. There shall come some of both sexes. Sons and daughters shall come in the most dutiful manner, as thy sons and thy daughters, resolved to be of thy family, to submit to the laws of thy family and put themselves under the tuition of it. They shall come *to be nursed at thy side*, to have their education with thee from their cradle." The church's children must be nursed at her side, not sent out to be nursed among strangers; there, where alone the unadulterated milk of the word is to be had, must the church's new-born babes be nursed, *that they may grow thereby*, 1 Pet. ii. 1, 2. Those that would enjoy the dignities and privileges of Christ's family must submit to the discipline of it.

3. What they shall bring with them and what advantage shall accrue to the church by their accession to it. Those that are brought into the church by the grace of God will be sure to bring all they are worth in with them, which with themselves they will devote to the honour and service of God and do good with in their places. (1.) The merchants shall write *holiness to the Lord* upon

their merchandise and their hire, as ch. xxiii.

18. "*The abundance of the sea*, either the wealth that is fetched out of the sea (the fish, the pearls) or that which is imported by sea, *shall all be converted to thee and to thy use*." The wealth of the rich merchants shall be laid out in works of piety and charity. (2.) The mighty men of the nations shall employ their might in the service of the church: "*The forces, or troops, of the Gentiles shall come unto thee*, to guard thy coasts, strengthen thy interests, and, if occasion be, to fight thy battles." The forces of the Gentiles had often been against the church, but now they shall be for it; for as God, when he pleases, can, and, when we please him, will, make even *our enemies to be at peace with us* (Prov. xvi. 7), so, when Christ overcomes the strong man armed, he divides his spoils, and makes that to serve his interests which had been used against them, Luke xi. 22. (3.) The wealth imported by land-carriage, as well as that by sea, shall be made use of in the service of God and the church (v. 6): *The camels and dromedaries that bring gold and incense* (gold to make the golden altar of and incense and sweet perfumes to burn upon it), *those of Midian and Sheba*, shall bring the richest commodities of their country, not to trade with, but to honour God with, and not in small quantities, but camel-loads of them. This was in part fulfilled when the *wise men of the east* (perhaps some of the countries here mentioned), drawn by the brightness of the star, came to Christ, and presented to him treasures of *gold, frankincense, and myrrh*, Matt. ii. 11. (4.) Great numbers of sacrifices shall be brought to God's altar, acceptable sacrifices, and, though brought by Gentiles, they shall find acceptance, v. 7. *Kedar* was famous for flocks, and probably the fattest rams were those of *Nebaioth*; these shall come up with acceptance on God's altar. God must be served and honoured with what we have, according as he has blessed us, and with the best we have. This was fulfilled when by the decree of Darius the governors beyond the rivers (perhaps of some of these countries) were ordered to furnish the temple at Jerusalem with *bullocks, rams, and lambs, for the burnt-offering of the God of heaven*, Ezra vi. 9. It had a further accomplishment, and we trust will have, in the bringing in of the fulness of the Gentiles to the church, which is called the *sacrificing or offering up of the Gentiles* unto God, Rom. xv. 16. The flocks and rams are precious souls; for they are said to minister to the church, and to come up as living sacrifices, presenting themselves to God by a *reasonable service on his altar*, Rom. xii. 1.

4. How God shall be honoured by the increase of the church and the accession of such numbers to it. (1.) They shall intend the honour of God's name in it. When they bring their gold and incense it shall not be to show the riches of their country, nor to

gain applause to themselves for piety and devotion, but to *show forth the praises of the Lord*, v. 6. Our greatest services and gifts to the church are not acceptable further than we have an eye to the glory of God in them. And this must be our business in our attendance on public ordinances, to *give unto the Lord the glory due to his name*; for *therefore*, as these here, we are called out of darkness into light, that we should *show forth the praises of him that called us*, 1 Pet. ii. 9.

(2.) God will advance the honour of his own name by it; so he has said (v. 7): *I will glorify the house of my glory*. The church is the house of God's glory, where he manifests his glory to his people and receives that honour by which they do honour to him. And it is for the glory of this house, and of him that keeps house there, both that the Gentiles shall bring their offerings to it and that they shall be accepted therein.

5. How the church shall herself be affected with this increase of her numbers, v. 5. (1.) She shall be in a transport of joy upon this account: "*Thou shalt see and flow together*" (or flow to and fro), "as in a pleasing agitation about it, surprised at it, but extremely glad of it." (2.) There shall be a mixture of fear with this joy: "*Thy heart shall fear*, doubting whether it be lawful to go in to the uncircumcised and eat with them." Peter was so impressed with this fear that he needed a vision and voice from heaven to help him over it, Acts x. 28. But, (3.) "When this fear is conquered thy heart shall be enlarged in holy love, so enlarged that thou shalt have room in it for all the Gentile converts; thou shalt not have such a narrow soul as thou hast had nor affections so confined within the Jewish pale." When God intends the beauty and prosperity of his church he gives this largeness of heart and an extensive charity. (4.) These converts flocking to the church shall be greatly admired (v. 8): *Who are these that fly as a cloud?* Observe, [1.] How the conversion of souls is here described. It is flying to Christ and to his church, for thither we are directed; it is flying like a cloud, though in great multitudes, so as to overspread the heavens, yet with great unanimity, all as one cloud. They shall come with speed, as a cloud flying on the wings of the wind, and come openly, and in the view of all, *their very enemies beholding them* (Rev. xi. 12), and yet not able to hinder them. They shall fly *as doves to their windows*, in great flights, many together; they fly on the wings of the harmless dove, which flies low, denoting their innocency and humility. They fly to Christ, to the church, to the word and ordinances, as doves, by instinct, to their own windows, to their own home; thither they fly for refuge and shelter when they are pursued by the birds of prey, and thither they fly for rest when they have been wandering and are weary, as Noah's dove to the ark.

[2.] How the conversion of souls is here admired. It is spoken of with wonder and pleasure: *Who are these?* We have reason to wonder that so many flock to Christ: when we see them all together we shall wonder whence they all came. And we have reason to admire with pleasure and affection those that do flock to him: *Who are these?* How excellent, how amiable are they! What a pleasant sight is it to see poor souls hastening to Christ, with a full resolution to abide with him!

9 Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the LORD thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because he hath glorified thee. 10 And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee: for in my wrath I smote thee, but in my favour have I had mercy on thee. 11 Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought. 12 For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted. 13 The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir-tree, the pine-tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious. 14 The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee, The city of the LORD, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

The promises made to the church in the foregoing verses are here repeated, ratified, and enlarged upon, designed still for the comfort and encouragement of the Jews after their return out of captivity, but certainly looking further, to the enlargement and advancement of the gospel church and the abundance of spiritual blessings with which it shall be enriched.

I. God will be very gracious and propitious to them. We must begin with that promise, because thence all the rest take rise. The sanctuary that was desolate begins to be repaired when God *causes his face to shine upon it*, Dan. ix. 17. All the favour



that the people of God find with men is owing to the light of God's countenance and his favour to them (v. 10): "All shall now make court to thee, *for in my wrath I smote thee, while thou wast in captivity*" (and the sufferings of the church, especially by its corruptions, decays, and divisions, against which these promises will be its relief, are sad tokens of God's displeasure), "but now *in my favour have I had mercy on thee, and therefore have all this mercy in store for thee.*"

II. Many shall be brought into the church, even from far countries (v. 9): *Surely the isles shall wait for me*, shall welcome the gospel, and shall attend God with their praises for it and their ready subjection to it. *The ships of Tarshish*, transport-ships, shall lie ready to carry members from far distant regions to the church, or (which is equivalent) to carry the ministers of the church to remote parts, to preach the gospel and to bring in souls to join themselves to the Lord. Observe, 1. Who are brought—*thy sons*, that is, such as are designed to be so, those *children of God that are scattered abroad*, John xi. 52. 2. What they shall bring with them. They live at such a distance that they cannot bring their flocks and their rams; but, like those who lived remote from Jerusalem (who, when they came up to worship at the feast, because they could not bring their tithes in kind, turned them into money), they shall *bring their silver and gold with them*. Note, When we give up ourselves to God we must with ourselves give up all we have to him. If we honour him with our spirits, we shall honour him with our substance. 3. To whom they shall devote and dedicate themselves and all they are worth—to *the name of the Lord thy God*, to God as the Lord of all and the church's God and King, even to the *Holy One of Israel* (whom Israel worships as a Holy One, in the beauty of holiness), *because he has glorified thee*. Note, The honour God puts upon his church and people should not only engage us to honour them, but invite us to join ourselves to them. *We will go with you, for God is with you*, Zech. viii. 23.

III. Those that come into the church shall be welcome; for so spacious is the holy city that though, *Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, yet still there is room*. "Therefore *thy gates shall be open continually* (v. 11), not only because thou hast no reason to fear thy enemies, but because thou hast reason to expect thy friends." It is usual with us to leave our doors open, or leave some one ready to open them, all night, if we look for a child or a guest to come in late. Note, Christ is always ready to entertain those that come to him, is never out of the way, nor can they ever come unseasonably; the gate of mercy is always open, night and day, or shall soon be opened to those that knock. Ministers, the door-keepers, must be always

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ready to admit those that offer themselves to the Lord. God not only keeps a good house in his church, but he keeps open house, that at any time, by the preaching of the word, *in season and out of season, the forces of the Gentiles*, and the kings or commanders of those forces, *may be brought into the church*. *Lift up your heads, O you gates!* and let such welcome guests as these come in.

IV. All that are about the church shall be made in some way or other serviceable to it. Though dominion is far from being founded in men's grace, it is founded in God's; and he that made the inferior creatures useful to man will make the nations of men useful to the church. The earth helped the woman. *All things are for your sakes*. So here (v. 10), "Even the sons of strangers, that have neither knowledge of thee nor kindness for thee, that have always been *aliens to the commonwealth of Israel*, even they shall build up thy wall, and their kings shall in that and other things minister unto thee and not think it any disparagement to them to do so." This was fulfilled when the king of Persia, and the governors of the provinces by his order, were aiding and assisting Nehemiah in building the wall about Jerusalem. Rather than Jerusalem's walls shall lie still in ruins, the sons of the stranger shall be raised up to build them. Even those that do not belong to the church may be a protection to it. And the greatest of men should not think it below them to minister to the church, but rejoice that they are in a capacity, and have a heart, to do it any service. Nay, it is the duty of all to do what they can in their places to advance the interests of God's kingdom among men; it is at their peril if they do not; for (v. 12), *The nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish*; not that they must perish by the sword or by human anathemas, or as if this gave any countenance to the using of external force for the propagating of the gospel, or as if men might be compelled by penalties and punishments to come into the church; by no means. But those who will not by faith submit to Jesus Christ, the King of the church, and serve him, shall perish eternally, Ps. ii. 12. Those that will not be subject to Christ's golden sceptre, to the government of his word and Spirit, that will not be brought under, or kept in, by the discipline of his family, shall be broken in pieces by his iron rod. *Bring them forth and slay them before me*, Luke xix. 27. Nations of such shall be utterly and eternally wasted, when Christ shall come to take vengeance on those that *obey not his gospel*, 2 Thess. i. 8.

V. There shall be abundance of beauty added to the ordinances of divine worship (v. 13): *The glory of Lebanon*, the strong and stately cedars that grow there, *shall come unto thee*, as of old to Solomon, when he built the temple (2 Chron. ii. 16), and with them shall be brought other timber, proper

for the carved work thereof, which the enemy had broken down, Ps. lxxiv. 5, 6. The temple, the *place of God's sanctuary*, shall be not only rebuilt, but beautified. It is the *place of his feet*, where he rests and resides, Ezek. xliii. 7. The ark is called his *foot-stool*, because it was under the mercy-seat, Ps. cxxxii. 7. This he will make glorious in the eyes of his people and of all their neighbours. *The glory of the latter house*, to which this refers, though in many instances inferior, was yet really *greater than the glory of the former*, because Christ came to that temple, Mal. iii. 1. It was likewise *adorned with goodly stones and gifts* (Luke xxi. 5), to which this promise may have some reference; yet so slightly did Christ speak of them there that we must suppose it to have its full accomplishment in the beauties of holiness, and the graces and comforts of the Spirit, with which gospel ordinances are adorned and enriched.

VI. The church shall appear truly great and honourable, v. 14. The people of the Jews, after their return out of captivity, by degrees became more considerable, and made a better figure than one would have expected, after they had been so much reduced, and than any of the other nations recovered that had been in like manner humbled by the Chaldeans. It is probable that many of those who had oppressed them in Babylon, when they were themselves driven out by the Persians, made their court to the Jews for shelter and supply and were willing to scrape acquaintance with them. This prophecy is further fulfilled when those that have been enemies to the church are wrought upon by the grace of God to see their error, and come, and join themselves to it: "*The sons of those that afflicted thee*, if not they themselves, yet their children, shall crouch to thee, shall beg pardon for their folly and beg an interest in thy favour and admission into thy family," 1 Sam. ii. 36. A promise like this is made to the church of Philadelphia, Rev. iii. 9. And it is intended to be, 1. A mortification to the proud oppressors of the church, that have afflicted her, and despised her, and taken a pleasure in doing so; they shall be brought down; their spirits shall be broken, and their condition shall be so mean and miserable that they shall be glad to be obliged to those whom they have most studied to disoblige. Note, Sooner or later God will pour contempt upon those that put contempt upon his people. 2. An exaltation to the poor oppressed ones of the church; and this is the honour that shall be done to them, they shall have an opportunity of doing good to those who have done evil to them and saving those alive who have afflicted and despised them. It is a pleasure to a good man, and he accounts it an honour, to show mercy to those with whom he has found no mercy. Yet this is not all. "They shall not only be-

come suppliants to thee for their own interest, but they shall give honour to thee: *They shall call thee, The city of the Lord*; they shall at length be convinced that thou art a favourite of heaven, and the particular care of the divine providence." That city is truly great and honourable, it is strong, it is rich, it is safe, it is beautiful, it is the most desirable place that can be to live in, which is *the city of the Lord*, which he owns, in which he dwells, in which religion is uppermost. Such a one is Zion; it is the place which God has chosen to put his name there; it is *the Zion of the Holy One of Israel*; therefore, we may be sure, it is a holy city, else the Holy One of Israel would never be called the patron of it.

15 Whereas thou hast been forsaken and hated, so that no man went through *thee*, I will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations. 16 Thou shalt also suck the milk of the Gentiles, and shalt suck the breast of kings: and thou shalt know that I the LORD *am* thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob. 17 For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron: I will also make thy officers peace, and thine exactors righteousness. 18 Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise. 19 The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the LORD shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. 20 Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the LORD shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended. 21 Thy people also *shall be* all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified. 22 A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I the LORD will hasten it in his time.

The happy and glorious state of the church is here further foretold, referring principally and ultimately to the Christian church and the spiritual peace of that, but under the type of that little gleam of outward peace which the Jews sometimes en-



joyed after their return out of captivity. This is here spoken of,

I. As compared with what it had been. *This* made her peace and honour the more pleasant, that her condition had been much otherwise.

1. She had been despised, but now she should be honoured, v. 15, 16. Jerusalem had been forsaken and hated, abandoned by her friends, abhorred by her enemies; no man went through that desolate city, but declined it as a rueful spectacle; it was an *astonishment and a hissing*. But now it shall be made an eternal excellency, being reformed from idolatry and having recovered the tokens of God's favour, and it shall be *the joy of good people for many generations*. Yet considering how short Jerusalem's excellency was, and how short it came of the vast compass of this promise, we must look for the full accomplishment of it in the perpetual excellencies of the gospel church, far exceeding those of the Old-Testament church, and the glorious privileges and advantages of the Christian religion, which are indeed the joy of many generations. Two things are here spoken of as her excellency and joy, in opposition to her having been forsaken and hated:—(1.) She shall find herself countenanced by her neighbours. The nations, and their kings, that are brought to embrace Christianity, shall lay themselves out for the good of the church, and maintain its interests with the tenderness and affection that the nurse shows to the child at her breast (v. 16): "*Thou shalt suck the milk of the Gentiles, not suck their blood (that is not the spirit of the gospel); thou shalt suck the breast of kings, who shall be to thee as nursing fathers.*" (2.) She shall find herself countenanced by her God: "*Thou shalt know that I the Lord am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, shalt know it by experience; for such a salvation, such a redemption, shall be wrought out for thee as plainly discovers itself to be the work of the Lord, the work of a mighty one, for it is a great salvation, of the Mighty One of Jacob, for it secures the welfare of all those that are Israelites indeed.*" They before knew the Lord to be their God; now they know him to be their Saviour, their Redeemer. Their Holy One now appears their Mighty One.

2. She had been impoverished, but now she shall be enriched, and every thing shall be changed for the better with her, v. 17. When those who were raised out of the dust are set among princes, instead of brass money in their purses they have gold, and instead of iron vessels in their houses they have silver ones, and other improvements agreeable: so much shall the spiritual glory of the New-Testament church exceed the external pomp and splendour of the Jewish economy, which had no glory in comparison with that which quite excels it, 2 Cor. iii. 10. When we had baptism in the room of

circumcision, the Lord's supper in the room of the passover, and a gospel ministry in the room of a Levitical priesthood, we had gold instead of brass. Sin turned gold into brass when Rehoboam made brazen shields instead of the golden ones he had pawned; but God's favour, when that returns, will turn brass again into gold.

3. She had been oppressed by her own princes, which was sadly complained of, not only as her sin, but as her misery (ch. lix. 14): but now all the grievances of that kind shall be redressed (v. 17): "*I will make thy officers peace; men of peace shall be made officers, and shall be indeed justices, not patrons of injustice, and justices of peace, not instruments of trouble and vexation. They shall be peace, that is, they shall sincerely seek thy welfare and by their means thou shalt enjoy good.*" They shall be *peace*, for they shall be righteousness; and *then* the peace is as a river, when the righteousness is as the waves of the sea. Even *exactors*, whose business it is to demand the public tribute, though they be exact, must not be exacting, but must be just to the subject as well as to the prince, and, according to the instructions John Baptist gave to the publicans, must *exact no more than is appointed them*, Luke iii. 13.

4. She had been insulted by her neighbours, invaded, spoiled, and plundered; but now it shall be so no more (v. 18): "*Violence shall no more be heard in thy land; neither the threats and triumphs of those that do violence nor the outcries and complaints of those that suffer violence shall again be heard, but every man shall peaceably enjoy his own. There shall be no wasting nor destruction, either of persons or possessions, any where within thy borders; but thy walls shall be called salvation (they shall be safe, and means of safety to thee) and thy gates shall be praise, praise to thee (every one shall commend thee for the good condition they are kept in), and praise to thy God, who strengthens the bars of thy gates.*" Ps. cxlvii. 13. When God's salvation is upon the walls it is fit that his praises should be in the gates, the places of concourse.

II. As completed in what it shall be. It should seem that in the close of this chapter we are directed to look further yet, as far forward as to the glory and happiness of heaven, under the type and figure of the flourishing state of the church on earth, which yet was never such as to come anything near to what is here foretold; and several of the images and expressions here made use of we find in the description of the *new Jerusalem*, Rev. xxi. 23; xxii. 5. As the prophets sometimes insensibly pass from the blessings of the Jewish church to the spiritual blessings of the Christian church, which are eternal, so sometimes they rise from the church militant to the church triumphant, where, and where only, all the



promised peace, and joy, and honour will be in perfection. 1. God shall be all in all in the happiness here promised; so he is always to true believers (v. 19): *The sun and the moon shall be no more thy light*. God's people, when they enjoy his favour, and walk in the light of his countenance, make little account of sun and moon, and the other lights of this world, but could walk comfortably in the light of the Lord though they should withdraw their shining. In heaven there shall be no occasion for sun or moon, for it is the inheritance of the saints in light, such light as will swallow up the light of the sun as easily as the sun does that of a candle. "Idolaters worshipped the sun and moon (which some have thought the most ancient and plausible idolatry); but these *shall be no more thy light*, shall no more be idolized, but the Lord shall be to thee a constant light, both day and night, in the night of adversity as well as in the day of prosperity." Those that make God their only light shall have him their all-sufficient light, their *sun and shield*. *Thy God shall be thy glory*. Note, God is the glory of those whose God he is and will be so to eternity. It is their glory that they have him for their God, and they glory in it; it is to them instead of beauty. God's people are, upon this account, an honourable people, that they have an interest in God as theirs in covenant. 2. The happiness here promised shall know no change, period, or allay (v. 20): "*Thy sun shall no more go down*, but it shall be eternal day, eternal sunshine, with thee; that shall not be thy sun which is sometimes eclipsed, often clouded, and, though it shine ever so bright, ever so warm, will certainly set and leave thee in the dark, in the cold, in a few hours; but *he shall be a sun*, a fountain of light to thee, who is himself the *Father of all lights*, with whom there is *no variableness, nor shadow of turning*," James i. 17. We read of the sun's standing still once, and not hastening to go down for the space of a day, and it was a glorious day, never was the like; but what was that to the day that shall never have a night? Or, if it had, it should be a light night; for *neither shall thy moon withdraw itself*; it shall never wane, shall never change, but be always at the full. The comforts and joys that are in heaven, the glories provided for the soul, as the light of the sun, and those prepared for the glorified body too, as the light of the moon, shall never know the least cessation or interruption; how should they when *the Lord shall himself be thy everlasting light*—a light which never wastes nor can ever be extinguished? *And the days of thy mourning shall be ended*, so as never to return; for *all tears shall be wiped away*, and the fountains of them, sin and affliction, dried up, so that *sorrow and sighing shall flee away* for ever. 3. Those that are entitled to this happiness, being duly prepared and qualified for

it, shall never be put out of the possession of it (v. 21): *Thy people*, that shall inhabit this New Jerusalem, *shall all be righteous*, all justified by the righteousness of the Messiah, all sanctified by his Spirit; all that people, that Jerusalem, must be righteous, must have that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord. They are all righteous, for we know that *the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God*. There are no people on earth that are all righteous; there is a mixture of some bad in the best societies on this side heaven; but there are no mixtures there. They shall be *all righteous*, that is, they shall be entirely righteous; as there shall be none corrupt among them, so there shall be no corruption in them; the *spirits of just men* shall there be *made perfect*. And they shall be *all the righteous* together who shall replenish the New Jerusalem; it is called the *congregation of the righteous*, Ps. i. 5. And, because they are *all righteous*, therefore *they shall inherit the land for ever*, for nothing but sin can turn them out of it. The perfection of the saints' holiness secures the perpetuity of their happiness. 4. The glory of the church shall redound to the honour of the church's God: "They shall appear to be the *branch of my planting, the work of my hands*, and I will own them as such." It was by the grace of God that they were designed to this happiness; they are *the branch of his planting*, or of his plantations; he broke them off from the wild olive and grafted them into the good olive, transplanted them out of the field, when they were as tender branches, into his nursery, that, being now planted in his garden on earth, they might shortly be removed to his *paradise in heaven*. It was by his grace likewise that they were prepared and fitted for this happiness; they are *the work of his hands* (Eph. ii. 10), are *wrought to the self-same thing*, 2 Cor. v. 5. It is a work of time, and, when it shall be finished, will appear a work of wonder; and God will be glorified, who began it, and carried it on; for the Lord Jesus will then be *admired in all those that believe*. God will glorify himself in glorifying his chosen. 5. They will appear the more glorious, and God will be the more glorified in them, if we compare what they are with what they were, the happiness they have arrived at with the smallness of their beginnings (v. 22): "*A little one shall become a thousand and a small one a strong nation*. The captives that returned out of Babylon strangely multiplied, and became a strong nation. The Christian church was a little one, a very small one at first—the number of their names was once but 120; yet it became a thousand. The stone cut out of the mountain without hands swelled so as to fill the earth. The triumphant church, and every glorified saint, will be a thousand out of a little one, a strong nation out of a small one. The grace and peace of the saints were at first like a grain



of mustard-seed, but they increase and multiply, and make a little one to become a thousand, the weak to be as David. When they come to heaven, and look back upon the smallness of their beginning, they will wonder how they got thither. And so wonderful is all this promise that it needed the ratification with which it is closed: *I the Lord will hasten it in his time*—all that is here said relating to the Jewish and Christian church, to the militant and triumphant church, and to every particular believer. (1.) It may seem too difficult to be brought about, and therefore may be despaired of; but the God of almighty power has undertaken it: "*I the Lord will do it*, who can do it, and who have determined to do it." It will be done by him whose power is irresistible and his purposes unalterable. (2.) It may seem to be delayed and put off so long that we are out of hopes of it; but, as the Lord will do it, so he will *hasten it*, will do it with all convenient speed; though much time may pass before it is done, no time shall be lost; he will *hasten it in its time*, in the proper time, in the season wherein it will be beautiful; he will do it in the time appointed by his wisdom, though not in the time prescribed by our folly. And this is really hastening it; for, though it seem to tarry, it does not tarry if it come in God's time, for we are sure that that is the best time, which he that believes will patiently wait for.

## CHAP. LXI.

In this chapter, I. We are sure to find the grace of Christ, promised by himself to a lost world in the everlasting gospel, under the type and figure of Isaiah's province, which was to foretell the deliverance of the Jews out of Babylon, ver. 1—3. II. We think we find the glories of the church of Christ, its spiritual glories, described under the type and figure of the Jews' prosperity after their return out of their captivity. 1. It is promised that the decays of the church shall be repaired, ver. 4. 2. That those from without shall be made servicable to the church, ver. 5. 3. That the church shall be a royal priesthood, maintained by the riches of the Gentiles, ver. 6. 4. That she shall have honour and joy in lieu of all her shame and sorrow, ver. 7. 5. That her affairs shall prosper, ver. 8. 6. That posterity shall enjoy these blessings, ver. 9. 7. That righteousness and salvation shall be the eternal matter of the church's rejoicing and thanksgiving, ver. 10, 11. If the Jewish church was ever thus blessed, much more shall the Christian church be so, and all that belong to it.

**T**HE Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to *them that are bound*; 2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; 3 To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees

of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.

He that is the best expositor of scripture has no doubt given us the best exposition of these verses, even our Lord Jesus himself, who read this in the synagogue at Nazareth (perhaps it was the lesson for the day) and applied it entirely to himself, saying, *This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears* (Luke iv. 17, 18, 21); and the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth, in the opening of this text, were admired by all that heard them. As Isaiah was authorized and directed to proclaim liberty to the Jews in Babylon, so was Christ, God's messenger, to publish a more joyful jubilee to a lost world. And here we are told,

I. How he was fitted and qualified for this work: *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me*, v. 1. The prophets had the Spirit of God moving them at times, both instructing them what to say and exciting them to say it. Christ had the Spirit always resting on him without measure; but to the same intent that the prophets had, as a Spirit of counsel and a Spirit of courage, ch. xi. 1—3. When he entered upon the execution of his prophetic office the Spirit, as a dove, *descended upon him*, Matt. iii. 16. This Spirit which was upon him he communicated to those whom he sent to proclaim the same glad tidings, saying to them, when he gave them their commission, *Receive you the Holy Ghost*, thereby ratifying it.

II. How he was appointed and ordained to it: *The Spirit of God is upon me, because the Lord God has anointed me*. What service God called him to he furnished him for; therefore he gave him his Spirit, because he had by a sacred and solemn unction set him apart to this great office, as kings and priests were of old destined to their offices by anointing. Hence the Redeemer was called the *Messiah*, the *Christ*, because he was *anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows*. He has sent me; our Lord Jesus did not go unsent; he had a commission from him that is the fountain of power; *the Father sent him and gave him commandment*. This is a great satisfaction to us, that, whatever Christ said, he had a warrant from heaven for; his doctrine was not his, but his that sent him.

III. What the work was to which he was appointed and ordained.

1. He was to be a preacher, was to execute the office of a prophet. So well pleased was he with the good-will God showed towards men through him that he would himself be the preacher of it, that an honour might thereby be put upon the ministry of the gospel and the faith of the saints might be confirmed and encouraged. He must preach *good tidings* (so *gospel* signifies) to the meek, to the penitent, and humble, and poor in spirit; to them the tidings of a Redeemer

will be indeed good tidings, pure gospel, faithful sayings, and worthy of all acceptance. The poor are commonly best disposed to receive the gospel (Jam. ii. 5), and it is likely to profit us when it is received with meekness, as it ought to be; to such Christ preached good tidings when he said, *Blessed are the meek.*

2. He was to be a healer. He was sent to bind up the broken-hearted, as pained limbs are rolled to give them ease, as broken bones and bleeding wounds are bound up, that they may knit and close again. Those whose hearts are broken for sin, who are truly humbled under the sense of guilt and dread of wrath, are furnished in the gospel of Christ with that which will make them easy and silence their fears. Those only who have experienced the pains of a penitential contrition may expect the pleasure of divine cordials and consolations.

3. He was to be a deliverer. He was sent as a prophet to preach, as a priest to heal, and as a king to issue out proclamations and those of two kinds:—(1.) Proclamations of peace to his friends: He shall proclaim liberty to the captives (as Cyrus did to the Jews in captivity) and the opening of the prison to those that were bound. Whereas, by the guilt of sin, we are bound over to the justice of God, are his lawful captives, sold for sin till payment be made of that great debt, Christ lets us know that he has made satisfaction to divine justice for that debt, that his satisfaction is accepted, and if we will plead that, and depend upon it, and make over ourselves and all we have to him, in a grateful sense of the kindness he has done us, we may by faith sue out our pardon and take the comfort of it; there is, and shall be, *no condemnation to us.* And whereas, by the dominion of sin in us, we are bound under the power of Satan, sold under sin, Christ lets us know that he has conquered Satan, has destroyed him that had the power of death and his works, and provided for us grace sufficient to enable us to shake off the yoke of sin and to loose ourselves from those bands of our neck. The Son is ready by his Spirit to make us free; and then we shall be free indeed, not only discharged from the miseries of captivity, but advanced to all the immunities and dignities of citizens. This is the gospel-proclamation, and it is like the blowing of the jubilee-trumpet, which proclaimed the great year of release (Lev. xxv. 9, 40), in allusion to which it is here called the *acceptable year of the Lord*, the time of our acceptance with God, which is the origin of our liberties; or it is called the *year of the Lord* because it publishes his free grace, to his own glory, and an *acceptable year* because it brings glad tidings to us, and what cannot but be very acceptable to those who know the capacities and necessities of their own souls. (2.) Proclamations of war against

his enemies. Christ proclaims the *day of vengeance of our God*, the vengeance he takes, [1.] On sin and Satan, death and hell, and all the powers of darkness, that were to be destroyed in order to our deliverance; these Christ triumphed over in his cross, having spoiled and weakened them, shamed them, and made a show of them openly, therein taking vengeance on them for all the injury they had done both to God and man, Col. ii. 15. [2.] On those of the children of men that stand it out against those fair offers. They shall not only be left, as they deserve, in their captivity, but be dealt with as enemies; we have the gospel summed up, Mark xvi. 16, where that part of it, *He that believes shall be saved*, proclaims the *acceptable year of the Lord* to those that will accept of it; but the other part, *He that believes not shall be damned*, proclaims the *day of vengeance of our God*, that vengeance which he will take on those that obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ, 2 Thess. i. 8.

4. He was to be a comforter, and so he is as preacher, healer, and deliverer; he is sent to comfort all who mourn, and who, mourning, seek to him, and not to the world, for comfort. Christ not only provides comfort for them, and proclaims it, but he applies it to them; he does by his Spirit comfort them. There is enough in him to comfort all who mourn, whatever their sore or sorrow is; but this comfort is sure to those who mourn in Zion, who sorrow after a godly sort, according to God, for his residence is in Zion,—who mourn because of Zion's calamities and desolations, and mingle their tears by a holy sympathy with those of all God's suffering people, though they themselves are not in trouble; such tears God has a bottle for (Ps. lvi. 8), such mourners he has comfort in store for. As blessings out of Zion are spiritual blessings, so mourners in Zion are holy mourners, such as carry their sorrows to the throne of grace (for in Zion was the mercy-seat) and pour them out as Hannah did before the Lord. To such as these Christ has appointed by his gospel, and will give by his Spirit (v. 3), those consolations which will not only support them under their sorrows, but turn them into songs of praise. He will give them, (1.) *Beauty for ashes.* Whereas they lay in ashes, as was usual in times of great mourning, they shall not only be raised out of their dust, but made to look pleasant. Note, The holy cheerfulness of Christians is their beauty and a great ornament to their profession. Here is an elegant *paronomasia* in the original: He will give them *phēer*—*beauty*, for *ēpher*—*ashes*; he will turn their sorrow into joy as quickly and as easily as you can transpose a letter; for he speaks, and it is done. (2.) *The oil of joy*, which makes the face to shine, instead of mourning, which disfigures the countenance and makes



it unlovely This oil of joy the saints have from that oil of gladness with which Christ himself was anointed above his fellows, Heb. i. 9. (3.) The garments of praise, such beautiful garments as were worn on thanksgiving-days, instead of the spirit of heaviness, dimness, or contraction—open joys for secret mournings. The spirit of heaviness they keep to themselves (Zion's mourners weep in secret); but the joy they are recompensed with they are clothed with as with a garment in the eye of others. Observe, Where God gives the oil of joy he gives the garment of praise. Those comforts which come from God dispose the heart to, and enlarge the heart in, thanksgivings to God. Whatever we have the joy of God must have the praise and glory of.

5. He was to be a planter; for the church is God's husbandry. Therefore he will do all this for his people, will cure their wounds, release them out of bondage, and comfort them in their sorrows, that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that they may be such and be acknowledged to be such, that they may be ornaments to God's vineyard and may be fruitful in the fruits of righteousness, as the branches of God's planting, ch. lx. 21. All that Christ does for us is to make us God's people, and some way serviceable to him as living trees, planted in the house of the Lord, and flourishing in the courts of our God; and all this that he may be glorified—that we may be brought to glorify him by a sincere devotion and an exemplary conversation (for herein is our Father glorified, that we bring forth much fruit), that others also may take occasion from God's favour shining on his people, and his grace shining in them, to praise him, and that he may be for ever glorified in his saints.

4 And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations. 5 And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your ploughmen and your vine-dressers. 6 But ye shall be named the priests of the Lord: men shall call you the ministers of our God: ye shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves. 7 For your shame ye shall have double; and for confusion they shall rejoice in their portion: therefore in their land they shall possess the double: everlasting joy shall be unto them. 8 For I the Lord love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt-offering; and

I will direct their work in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. 9 And their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed.

Promises are here made to the Jews now returned out of captivity, and settled again in their own land, which are to be extended to the gospel church, and all believers, who through grace are delivered out of spiritual thralldom; for they are capable of being spiritually applied.

I. It is promised that their houses shall be rebuilt (v. 4), that their cities shall be raised out of the ruins in which they had long lain, and be fitted up for their use again: *They shall build the old wastes; the old wastes shall be built, the waste cities shall be repaired, the former desolations, even the desolations of many generations, which it was feared would never be repaired, shall be raised up.* The setting up of Christianity in the world repaired the decays of natural religion and raised up those desolations both of piety and honesty which had been for many generations the reproach of mankind. An unsanctified soul is like a city that is broken down and has no walls, like a house in ruins; but by the power of Christ's gospel and grace it is repaired, it is put in order again, and fitted to be a habitation of God through the Spirit. And they shall do this, those that are released out of captivity; for we are brought out of the house of bondage that we may serve God, both in building up ourselves to his glory and in helping to build up his church on earth.

II. Those that were so lately servants themselves, working for their oppressors and lying at their mercy, shall now have servants to do their work for them and be at their command, not of their brethren (they are all the Lord's freemen), but of the strangers, and the sons of the alien, who shall keep their sheep, till their ground, and dress their gardens, the ancient employments of Abel, Cain, and Adam: *Strangers shall feed your flocks, v. 5.* When, by the grace of God, we attain to a holy indifference as to all the affairs of this world, buying as though we possessed not—when, though our hands are employed about them, our hearts are not entangled with them, but reserved entire for God and his service—then the sons of the alien are our ploughmen and vine-dressers.

III. They shall not only be released out of their captivity, but highly preferred and honourably employed (v. 6): *While the strangers are keeping your flocks, you shall be keeping the charge of the sanctuary; instead of being slaves to your task-masters, you shall be named the priests of the Lord, a*

high and holy calling." Priests were princes' peers, and in Hebrew were called by the same name. You shall be the ministers of our God, as the Levites were. Note, Those whom God sets at liberty he sets to work; he delivers them out of the hands of their enemies that they may serve him, Luke i. 74, 75; Ps. cxvi. 16. But his service is perfect freedom, nay, it is the greatest honour. When God brought Israel out of Egypt he took them to be to him a kingdom of priests, Exod. xix. 6. And the gospel church is a royal priesthood, 1 Pet. ii. 9. All believers are made to our God kings and priests; and they ought to conduct themselves as such in their devotions and in their whole conversation, with holiness to the Lord written upon their foreheads, that men may call them the priests of the Lord.

IV. The wealth and honour of the Gentile converts shall redound to the benefit and credit of the church, v. 6. *The Gentiles* shall be brought into the church. Those that were strangers shall become fellow-citizens with the saints; and with themselves they shall bring all they have, to be devoted to the glory of God and used in his service; and the priests, the Lord's ministers, shall have the advantage of it. It will be a great strengthening and quickening, as well as a comfort and encouragement, to all good Christians, to see the Gentiles serving the interests of God's kingdom. 1. They shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, not which they have themselves seized by violence, but which are fairly and honourably presented to them, as gifts brought to the altar, which the priests and their families lived comfortably upon. It is not said, "You shall hoard the riches of the Gentiles, and treasure them," but, "You shall eat them;" for there is nothing better in riches than to use them and to do good with them. 2. They shall boast themselves in their glory. Whatever was the honour of the Gentile converts before their conversion—their nobility, estates, learning, virtue, or places of trust and power—it shall all turn to the reputation of the church to which they have joined themselves; and whatever is their glory after their conversion—their holy zeal and strictness of conversation, their usefulness, their patient suffering, and all the displays of that blessed change which divine grace has made in them—shall be very much for the glory of God and therefore all good men shall glory in it.

V. They shall have abundance of comfort and satisfaction in their own bosoms, v. 7. The Jews no doubt were thus privileged after their return; they were in a new world, and now knew how to value their liberty and property, the pleasures of which were continually fresh and blooming. Much more do all those rejoice whom Christ has brought into the glorious liberty of God's children, especially when the privileges of their adoption shall be completed in the resurrection of the

body. 1. *They shall rejoice in their portion*; they shall not only have their own again, but (which is a further gift of God) they shall have the comfort of it, and a heart to rejoice in it, Eccl. iii. 13. Though the houses of the returned Jews, as well as their temple, be much inferior to what they were before the captivity, yet they shall be well pleased with them and thankful for them. It is a portion in their land, their own land, the holy land, Immanuel's land, and therefore they shall rejoice in it, having so lately known what it was to be strangers in a strange land. Those that have God and heaven for their portion have reason to say that they have a worthy portion and to rejoice in it.

2. *Everlasting joy shall be unto them*, that is, a joyful state of their people, which shall last long, much longer than the captivity had lasted. Yet that joy of the Jewish nation was so much allayed, so often interrupted, and so soon brought to an end, that we must look for the accomplishment of this promise in the spiritual joy which believers have in God and the eternal joy they hope for in heaven. 3. This shall be a double recompence to them, and more than double, for all the reproach and vexation they have lain under in the land of their captivity: "For your shame you shall have double honour, and in your land you shall possess double wealth, to what you lost; the blessing of God upon it, and the comfort you shall have in it, shall make an abundant reparation for all the damages you have received. You shall be owned not only as God's sons, but as his first-born (Exod. iv. 22), and therefore entitled to a double portion." As the miseries of their captivity were so great that in them they are said to have received double for all their sins (ch. xl. 2), so the joys of their return shall be so great that in them they shall receive double for all their shame. The former is applicable to the fulness of Christ's satisfaction, in which God received double for all our sins; the latter to the fulness of heaven's joys, in which we shall receive more than double for all our services and sufferings. Job's case illustrates this: when God turned again his captivity, he gave him twice as much as he had before.

VI. God will be their faithful guide and a God in covenant with them (v. 8): *I will direct their work in truth*. God by his providence will order their affairs for the best, according to the word of his truth. He will guide them in the ways of true prosperity, by the rules of true policy. He will by his grace direct the works of good people in the right way, the true way that leads to happiness; he will direct them to be done in sincerity and then they are pleasing to him. God desires truth in the inward parts; and, if we do our works in truth, he will make an everlasting covenant with us; for to those that walk before him and are upright he will certainly be a God all-sufficient. Now,



as a reason both of this and of the foregoing promise, that God will recompense to them *double for their shame*, those words come in, in the former part of the verse, *I the Lord love judgment*. He loves that judgment should be done among men, both between magistrates and subjects and between neighbour and neighbour, and therefore he hates all injustice; and, when wrongs are done to his people by their oppressors and persecutors, he is displeased with them, not only because they are done to his people, but because they are wrongs, and against the eternal rules of equity. If men do not do justice, he loves to do judgment himself in giving redress to those that suffer wrong and punishing those that do wrong. God pleads his people's injured cause, not only because he is jealous for them, but because he is jealous for justice. To illustrate this, it is added that he *hates robbery for burnt-offering*. He hates injustice even in his own people, who honour him with what they have in their burnt-offerings, much more does he hate it when it is against his own people; if he hates robbery when it is for burnt-offerings to himself, much more when it is for burnt-offerings to idols, and when not only his people are robbed of their estates, but he is robbed of his offerings. It is a truth much to the honour of God that ritual services will never atone for the violation of moral precepts, nor will it justify any man's robbery to say, "It was for burnt-offerings," or *Corban—It is a gift*. Behold, *to obey is better than sacrifice, to do justly and love mercy better than thousands of rams*; nay, that robbery is most of all hateful to God which is covered with this pretence, for it makes the righteous God to be the patron of unrighteousness. Some make this a reason of the rejection of the Jews upon the bringing in of the Gentiles (v. 6), because they were so corrupt in their morals, and, while they tithed mint and cummin, made nothing of *judgment and mercy* (Matt. xxiii. 23), whereas *God loves judgment* and insists upon that, and he hates both *robbery for burnt offerings* and *burnt-offerings for robbery* too, as that of the Pharisees, who made long prayers that they might the more plausibly devour widows' houses. Others read these words thus: *I hate rapine by iniquity*, that is, the spoil which the enemies of God's people had unjustly made of them; God hated this, and therefore would reckon with them for it.

VII. God will entail a blessing upon their posterity after them (v. 9): *Their seed* (the children of those persons themselves that are now the blessed of the Lord, or their successors in profession, the church's seed) shall be *accounted to the Lord for a generation*. Ps. xxii. 30. 1. They shall signalize themselves and make their neighbours to take notice of them: *They shall be known among the Gentiles*, shall distinguish themselves by

the gravity, seriousness, humility, and cheerfulness of their conversation, especially by that brotherly love by which all men shall know them to be Christ's disciples. And, they thus distinguishing themselves, God shall dignify them, by making them the blessings of their age and instruments of his glory, and by giving them remarkable tokens of his favour, which shall make them eminent and gain them respect from all about them. Let the children of godly parents love in such a manner that they may be known to be such, that all who observe them may see in them the fruits of a good education, and an answer to the prayers that were put up for them; and then they may expect that God will make them known, by the fulfilling of that promise to them, that *the generation of the upright shall be blessed*. 2. God shall have the glory of this, for every one shall attribute it to the blessing of God; all that see them shall see so much of the grace of God in them, and his favour towards them, that they shall *acknowledge them to be the seed which the Lord has blessed* and doth bless, for it includes both. See what it is to be blessed of God. Whatever good appears in any it must be taken notice of as the fruit of God's blessing and he must be glorified in it.

10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh *himself* with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth *herself* with her jewels. 11 For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the LORD GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.

Some make this the song of joy and praise to be sung by the prophet in the name of Jerusalem, congratulating her on the happy change of her circumstances in the accomplishment of the foregoing promises; others make it to be spoken by Christ in the name of the New-Testament church triumphing in gospel grace. We may take in both, the former as a type of the latter. We are here taught to rejoice with holy joy, to God's honour. 1. In the beginning of this good work, the clothing of the church with *righteousness and salvation*, v. 10. Upon this account *I will greatly rejoice in the Lord*. Those that rejoice in God have cause to rejoice greatly, and we need not fear running into an extreme in the greatness of our joy when we make God the gladness of our joy. The first gospel song begins like this, *My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit*

*hath rejoiced in God my Saviour*, Luke i. 46, 47. There is just matter for this joy, and all the reason in the world why it should terminate in God; for salvation and righteousness are wrought out and brought in, and the church is clothed with them. The salvation God wrought for the Jews, and that righteousness of his in which he appeared for them, and that reformation which appeared among them, made them look as glorious in the eyes of all wise men as if they had been clothed in robes of state or nuptial garments. Christ has clothed his church with an eternal salvation (and that is truly great) by clothing it with the righteousness both of justification and sanctification. *The clean linen is the righteousness of saints*, Rev. xix. 8. Observe how these two are put together; those, and those only, shall be clothed with the garments of salvation hereafter that are covered with the robe of righteousness now: and those garments are rich and splendid clothing, like the priestly garments (for so the word signifies) with which the *bridegroom decks himself*. The brightness of the sun itself is compared to them. Ps. xix. 5, *He is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, completely dressed*. Such is the beauty of God's grace in those that are clothed with the robe of righteousness, that by the righteousness of Christ are recommended to God's favour and by the sanctification of the Spirit have God's image renewed upon them; they are decked as a bride to be espoused to God, and taken into covenant with him; they are decked as a priest to be employed for God, and taken into communion with him. 2. In the progress and continuance of this good work, v. 11. It is not like a day of triumph, which is glorious for the present, but is soon over. No; the righteousness and salvation with which the church is clothed are durable clothing; so they are said to be; *ch. xxiii. 18*. The church, when she is pleasing herself with the righteousness and salvation that Jesus Christ has clothed her with, rejoices to think that these inestimable blessings shall both spring for future ages and spread to distant regions. (1.) They shall spring forth for ages to come, as the fruits of the earth which are produced every year, from generation to generation. *As the earth, even that which lies common, brings forth her bud*, the tender grass at the return of the year, and as *the garden enclosed causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth* in their season, so duly, so constantly, so powerfully, and with such advantage to mankind *will the Lord God cause righteousness and praise to spring forth*, by virtue of the covenant of grace, as, in the former case, by virtue of the covenant of providence. See what the promised blessings are—*righteousness and praise* (for those that are clothed with righteousness *show forth the praises of him that clothed them*); these shall spring

forth under the influence of the dew of divine grace. Though it may sometimes be winter with the church, when those blessings seem to wither and do not appear, yet the root of them is fixed, a spring-time will come, when through the reviving beams of the approaching Sun of righteousness they shall flourish again. (2.) They shall spread far, and *spring forth before all the nations*; the great salvation shall be published and proclaimed to all the world and the ends of the earth shall see it.

CHAP. LXII.

The business of prophets was both to preach and pray. In this chapter, I. The prophet determines to apply closely and constantly to this business, ver. 1. II. God appoints him and others of his prophets to continue to do so, for the encouragement of his people during the delays of their deliverance, ver. 6, 7. III. The promises are here repeated and ratified of the great things God would do for his church, for the Jews after their return out of captivity and for the Christian church when it shall be set up in the world. 1. The church shall be made honourable in the eyes of the world, ver. 2. 2. It shall appear to be very dear to God, precious and honourable in his sight, ver. 3–5. 3. It shall enjoy great plenty, ver. 8, 9. 4. It shall be released out of captivity and grow up again into a considerable nation, particularly owned and favoured by heaven ver. 10–12.

**F**OR Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth. 2 And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name. 3 Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. 4 Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzi-bah, and thy land Beulah: for the LORD delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married. 5 For as a young man marryeth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.

The prophet here tells us,

I. What he will do for the church. A prophet, as he is a seer, so he is a spokesman. This prophet resolves to perform that office faithfully, v. 1. *He will not hold his peace*; he will not rest; he will mind his business, will take pains, and never desire to take his ease; and herein he was a type of Christ, who was indefatigable in executing the office of a prophet and made it his meat and drink till he had finished his work. Observe here, 1. What the prophet's resolution is: *He will not hold his peace*. He will continue instant in preaching, will not only faithfully deliver, but frequently repeat, the messages he has received from



*the Lord.* If people receive not the precepts and promises at first, he will inculcate them and give them line upon line. And he will continue instant in prayer; he will never hold his peace at the throne of grace till he has prevailed with God for the mercies promised; he will *give himself to prayer and to the ministry of the word*, as Christ's ministers must (Acts vi. 4), who must labour frequently in both and never be weary of this well-doing. The business of ministers is to speak from God to his people and to God for his people; and in neither of these must they be silent. 2. What is the principle of this resolution—for *Zion's sake, and for Jerusalem's*, not for the sake of any private interest of his own, but for the church's sake, because he has an affection and concern for Zion, and it lies near his heart. Whatever becomes of his own house and family, he desires to see the good of Jerusalem and resolves to seek it all the days of his life, Ps. cxii. 8, 9; cxviii. 5. It is God's Zion and his Jerusalem, and it is therefore dear to him, because it is so to God and because God's glory is interested in its prosperity. 3. How long he resolves to continue this importunity—till the promise of the church's righteousness and salvation, given in the foregoing chapter, be accomplished. Isaiah will not himself live to see the release of the captives out of Babylon, much less the bringing in of the gospel, in which *grace reigns through righteousness unto life* and salvation; yet he will *not hold his peace till these be accomplished*, even the utmost of them, because his prophecies will continue speaking of these things, and there shall in every age be a remnant that shall continue to pray for them, as successors to him, till the promises be performed, and so the prayers answered that were grounded upon them. Then the church's righteousness and salvation will go forth as brightness, and as a lamp that burns, so plainly that it will carry its own evidence along with it. It will bring honour and comfort to the church, which will hereupon both look pleasant and appear illustrious; and it will bring instruction and direction to the world, a light not only to the eyes but to the feet, and to the paths of those who before sat in darkness and in the shadow of death.

II. What God will do for the church. The prophet can but pray and preach, but God will confirm the word and answer the prayers. 1. The church shall be greatly admired. When that righteousness which is her salvation, her praise, and her glory, shall be brought forth, the Gentiles shall see it. The tidings of it shall be carried to the Gentiles, and a tender of it made to them; they may so see this righteousness as to share in it if it be not their own fault. "Even kings shall see and be in love with the glory of thy righteousness" (v. 2), shall overlook the glory of their own courts and

kingdoms, and look at, and look after, the spiritual glory of the church as that which excels. 2. She shall be truly admirable. Great names make men considerable in the world, and great respect is paid them thereupon; now it is agreed that *honor est in honorante*—honour derives its value from the dignity of him who confers it. God is the fountain of honour and from him the church's honour comes: "Thou shalt be called by a new name, a pleasant name, such as thou wast never called by before, no, not in the day of thy greatest prosperity, and the reverse of that which thou wast called by in the day of thy affliction; thou shalt have a new character, be advanced to a new dignity, and those about thee shall have new thoughts of thee." This seems to be alluded to in that promise (Rev. ii. 17) of the *white stone and in the stone a new name*, and that (Rev. iii. 12) of the *name of the city of my God and my new name*. It is a name which the mouth of the Lord shall name, who, we are sure, miscalls nothing, and who will oblige others to call her by the name he has given her; for his judgment is according to truth and all shall concur with it sooner or later. Two names God shall give her:—(1.) He shall call her his crown (v. 3): *Thou shalt be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord*, not on his head (as adding any real honour or power to him, as crowns do to those that are crowned with them), but in his hand. He is pleased to account them, and show them forth, as a glory and beauty to him. When he took them to be his people it was that they might be unto him for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory (Jer. xiii. 11): "Thou shalt be a crown of glory and a royal diadem, through the hand, the good hand, of thy God upon thee; he shall make thee so, for he shall be to thee a crown of glory, ch. xxviii. 5. Thou shalt be so in his hand, that is, under his protection; he that shall put glory upon thee shall create a defence upon all that glory, so that the flowers of thy crown shall never wither nor shall its jewels be lost." (2.) He shall call her his spouse, v. 4, 5. This is a yet greater honour, especially considering what a forlorn condition she had been in. [1.] Her case had been very melancholy. She was called forsaken and her land desolate during the captivity, like a woman reproachfully divorced or left a disconsolate widow. Such was the state of religion in the world before the preaching of the gospel—it was in a manner forsaken and desolate, a thing that no man looked after nor had any real concern for. [2.] It should now be very pleasant, for God would return in mercy to her. Instead of those two names of reproach, she shall be called by two honourable names. First, She shall be called *Hephzi-bah*, which signifies, *My delight is in her*; it was the name of Hezekiah's queen, Manassch's mother (2 Kings xxi. 1), a proper name for a wife.

who ought to be her husband's delight, Prov. v. 19. And here it is the church's Maker that is her husband: *The Lord delights in thee* God by his grace has wrought that in his church which makes her his delight, she being refined, and reformed, and brought home to him; and then by his providence he does that for her which makes it appear that she is his delight and that he delights to do her good. *Secondly*, She shall be called *Beulah*, which signifies *married*, whereas she had been desolate, a condition opposed to that of the *married wife*, ch. liv. 1. "*Thy land shall be married*, that is, it shall become fruitful again, and be replenished." Though she has long been barren, she shall again be peopled, shall again be made to keep house and to be a joyful mother of children, Ps. cxiii. 9. *She shall be married*, for, 1. Her sons shall heartily espouse the land of their nativity and its interests, which they had for a long time neglected, as despairing ever to have any comfortable enjoyment of it: *Thy sons shall marry thee*, that is, they shall live with thee and take delight in thee. When they were in Babylon, they seemed to have espoused that land, for they were appointed to settle, and to seek the peace of it, Jer. xxix. 5—7. But now they shall again marry their own land, as a young man marries a virgin that he takes great delight in, is extremely fond of, and is likely to have many children by. It bodes well to a land when its own natives and inhabitants are pleased with it, prefer it before other lands, when its princes marry their country and resolve to take their lot with it. 2. *Her God* (which is much better) shall betroth her to himself in righteousness, Hosea ii. 19, 20. He will take pleasure in his church: *As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride*, is pleased with his relation to her and her affection to him, *so shall thy God rejoice over thee*: he shall rest in his love to thee (Zeph. iii. 17); *he shall take pleasure in thee* (Ps. cxlvii. 11), and shall delight to do thee good with his whole heart and his whole soul, Jer. xxxii. 41. This is very applicable to the love Christ has for his church and the complacency he takes in it, which appears so brightly in Solomon's Song, and which will be complete in heaven.

6 I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, *which* shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, 7 And give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth. 8 The Lord hath sworn by his right hand, and by the arm of his strength, Surely I will no more give thy corn to be meat for thine enemies; and the sons of the stranger shall not drink thy wine, for the which thou hast laboured: 9

But they that have gathered it shall eat it, and praise the Lord; and they that have brought it together shall drink it in the courts of my holiness.

Two things are here promised to Jerusalem:—

I. Plenty of the means of grace—abundance of good preaching and good praying (v. 6, 7), and this shows the method God takes when he designs mercy for a people; he first brings them to their duty and pours out a spirit of prayer upon them, and then brings salvation to them. Provision is made,

1. That ministers may do their duty as watchmen. It is here spoken of as a token for good, as a step towards further mercy and an earnest of it, that, in order to what he designed for them, he would set *watchmen on their walls who should never hold their peace*. Note, (1.) Ministers are watchmen on the church's walls, for it is as a city besieged, whose concern it is to have sentinels on the walls, to take notice and give notice of the motions of the enemy. It is necessary that, as watchmen, they be wakeful, and faithful, and willing to endure hardness. (2.) They are concerned to stand upon their guard day and night; they must never be off their watch as long as those for whose souls they watch are not out of danger. (3.) They must never hold their peace; they must take all opportunities to give warning to sinners, in season, out of season, and must never betray the cause of Christ by a treacherous or cowardly silence. They must never hold their peace at the throne of grace; they must pray, and not faint, as Moses lifted up his hands and kept them steady, till Israel had obtained the victory over Amalek, Exod. xvii. 10, 12.

2. That people may do their duty. As those that make mention of the Lord, let not them keep silence neither, let not them think it enough that their watchmen pray for them, but let them pray for themselves; all will be little enough to meet the approaching mercy with due solemnity. Note, (1.) It is the character of God's professing people that they make mention of the Lord, and continue to do so even in bad times, when the land is termed *forsaken* and *desolate*. They are the *Lord's remembrancers* (so the margin reads it); they remember the Lord themselves and put one another in mind of him. (2.) God's professing people must be a praying people, must be public-spirited in prayer, must wrestle with God in prayer, and continue to do so: "*Keep not silence*; never grow remiss in the duty nor weary of it." *Give him no rest*—alluding to an importunate beggar, to the widow that with her continual coming wearied the judge into a compliance. God said to Moses, *Let me alone* (Exod. xxxii. 10), and Jacob to Christ, *I will not let thee go except thou bless me*, Gen. xxxii. 26. (3.)



God is so far from being displeased with our pressing importunity, as men commonly are, that he invites and encourages it; he bids us to cry after him; he is not like those disciples who discouraged a petitioner, Matt. xv. 23. He bids us make pressing applications at the throne of grace, and *give him no rest*, Luke xi. 5, 8. He suffers himself not only to be reasoned with, but to be wrestled with. (4.) The public welfare or prosperity of God's Jerusalem is that which we should be most importunate for at the throne of grace; we should pray for the good of the church. [1.] That it may be safe, that he would *establish* it, that the interests of the church may be firm, may be settled for the present and secured to posterity. [2.] That it may be great, may be *a praise in the earth*, that it may be praised, and God may be praised for it. When gospel truths are cleared and vindicated, when gospel ordinances are duly administered in their purity and power, when the church becomes eminent for holiness and love, then Jerusalem is a praise in the earth, then it is in reputation. (5.) We must persevere in our prayers for mercy to the church till the mercy come; we must do as the prophet's servant did, go yet seven times, till the promising cloud appear, 1 Kings xviii. 44. (6.) It is a good sign that God is coming towards a people in ways of mercy when he pours out a spirit of prayer upon them and stirs them up to be fervent and constant in their intercessions.

II. Plenty of all other good things, v. 8. This follows upon the former; when the people praise God, when *all the people praise him*, then *shall the earth yield her increase* (Ps. lxxvii. 5, 6), and outward prosperity, crowning its piety, shall help to make Jerusalem a praise in the earth. Observe,

1. The great distress they had been in, and the losses they had sustained. Their corn had been meat for their enemies, which they hoped would be meat for themselves and their families. Here was a double grievance, that they themselves wanted that which was necessary to the support of life and were in danger of perishing for want of it, and that their enemies were strengthened by it, had their camp victualled with it, and so were the better able to do them a mischief. God is said to give their corn to their enemies, because he not only permitted it, but ordered it, to be the just punishment both of their abuse of plenty and of their symbolizing with strangers, *ch. i. 7*. The wine which they had laboured for, and which in their affliction they needed for the relief of those among them that were of a heavy heart, strangers drank it, to gratify their lusts with; this sore judgment was threatened for their sins, Lev. xxvi. 16; Deut. xxviii. 33. See how uncertain our creature-comforts are, and how much it is our wisdom to labour for that meat which we can never be robbed of.

2. The great fulness and satisfaction they should now be restored to (v. 9): *Those that have gathered it shall eat it, and praise the Lord*. See here, (1.) God's mercy in giving plenty, and peace to enjoy it,—that the earth yields her increase, that there are hands to be employed in gathering it in, and that they are not taken off by plague and sickness, or otherwise employed in war,—that strangers and enemies do not come and gather it for themselves, or take it from us when we have gathered it,—that we eat the labour of our hands and the bread is not eaten out of our mouths,—and especially that we have opportunity and a heart to honour God with it, and that his courts are open to us and we are not restrained from attending on him in them. (2.) Our duty in the enjoyment of this mercy. We must gather what God gives, with care and industry; we must eat it freely and cheerfully, not bury the gifts of God's bounty, but make use of them. We must, when we have eaten and are full, *bless the Lord*, and give him thanks for his bounty to us; and we must serve him with our abundance, use it in works of piety and charity, eat it and *drink it in the courts of his holiness*, where the altar, the priest, and the poor must all have their share. The greatest comfort that a good man has in his meat and drink is that it furnishes him with a meat-offering and a drink-offering for the Lord his God (Joel ii. 14); the greatest comfort that he has in an estate is that it gives him an opportunity of honouring God and doing good. This wine is to be *drunk in the courts of God's holiness*, and therefore moderately and with sobriety, as before the Lord.

3. The solemn ratification of this promise: *The Lord has sworn by his right hand, and by the arm of his strength*, that he will do this for his people. God confirms it by an oath, that his people, who trust in him and his word, may have *strong consolation*, Heb. vi. 17, 18. And, since he can swear by no greater, he swears by himself, sometimes by his being (*As I live*, Ezek. xxxiii. 11), sometimes by his holiness (Ps. lxxxix. 35), here by his power, his right hand (which was lifted up in swearing, Deut. xxxii. 40), and his arm of power; for it is a great satisfaction to those who build their hopes on God's promise to be sure that *what he has promised he is able to perform*, Rom. iv. 21. To assure us of this he has sworn by his strength, pawning the reputation of his omnipotence upon it; if he do not do it, let it be said, *It was because he could not*, which the Egyptians shall never say (Num. xiv. 16) nor any other. It is the comfort of God's people that his power is engaged for them, his right hand, where the Mediator sits.

10 Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a stand-

ard for the people. 11 Behold, the LORD hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. 12 And they shall call them, The holy people, The redeemed of the LORD: and thou shalt be called, Sought out, A city not forsaken.

This, as many like passages before, refers to the deliverance of the Jews out of Babylon, and, under the type and figure of that, to the great redemption wrought out by Jesus Christ, and the proclaiming of gospel grace and liberty through him. 1. Way shall be made for this salvation; all difficulties shall be removed, and whatever might obstruct it shall be taken out of the way, *v.* 10. The gates of Babylon shall be thrown open, that they may with freedom go through them; the way from Babylon to the land of Israel shall be prepared; causeways shall be made and cast up through wet and miry places, and the stones gathered out from places rough and rocky; in the convenient places appointed for their rendezvous standards shall be set up for their direction and encouragement, that they may embody for their greater safety. Thus John Baptist was sent to *prepare the way of the Lord*, Matt. iii. 3. And, before Christ by his graces and comforts comes to any for salvation, preparation is made for him by repentance, which is called the *preparation of the gospel of peace*, Eph. vi. 15. Here the way is levelled by it, there the feet are shod with it, which comes all to one, for both are in order to a journey. 2. Notice shall be given of this salvation, *v.* 11, 12. It shall be proclaimed to the captives that they are set at liberty and may go if they please; it shall be proclaimed to their neighbours, to all about them, to the end of the world, that God has pleaded Zion's just, injured, and despised cause. Let it be said to Zion, for her comfort, *Behold, thy salvation comes* (that is, thy Saviour, who brings salvation); he will bring such a work, such a reward, in this salvation, as shall be admired by all, a reward of comfort and peace with him; but a work of humiliation and reformation before him, to prepare his people for that recompence of their sufferings; and then, with reference to each, it follows, they shall be called, *The holy people*, and the *redeemed of the Lord*. The work before him, which shall be wrought in them and upon them, shall denominate them a holy people, cured of their inclination to idolatry and consecrated to God only; and the reward with him, the deliverance wrought for them, shall denominate them the *redeemed of the Lord*, so redeemed as none but God could redeem them, and redeemed to be his, their bonds loosed, that they might be his servants.

Jerusalem shall then be called, *Sought out, a city not forsaken*. She had been forsaken for many years; there were neither traders nor worshippers that enquired the way to Jerusalem as formerly, when it was frequented by both. But now God will again make her considerable. She shall be sought out, visited, resorted to, and court made to her, as much as ever. When Jerusalem is called a *holy city*, then it is called *sought out*; for holiness puts an honour and beauty upon any place or person, which draws respect, and makes them to be admired, beloved, and enquired after. But this being proclaimed to the end of the world must have a reference to the gospel of Christ, which was to be preached to every creature; and it intimates, (1.) The glory of Christ. It is published immediately to the church, but is thence echoed to every nation: *Behold, thy salvation cometh*. Christ is not only the Saviour, but the salvation itself; for the happiness of believers is not only from him, but in him, *ch.* xii. 2. His salvation consists both in the work and in the reward which he brings with him; for those that are his shall neither be idle nor lose their labour. (2.) The beauty of the church. Christians shall be called *saints* (1 Cor. i. 2), *the holy people*, for they are chosen and called to salvation through sanctification. They shall be called the *redeemed of the Lord*; to him they owe their liberty, and therefore to him they owe their service, and they shall not be ashamed to own both. None are to be called the *redeemed of the Lord* but those that are the *holy people*; the people of God's purchase are a holy nation. And they shall be called, *Sought out*. God shall seek them out, and find them, wherever they are dispersed, eclipsed, or lost in a crowd; men shall seek them out, that they may join themselves to them, and not forsake them. It is good to associate with the *holy people*, that we may learn their ways, and with the *redeemed of the Lord*, that we may share in the blessings of the redemption.

## CHAP. LXIII.

In this chapter we have, I. God coming towards his people in ways of mercy and deliverance, and this is to be joined to the close of the foregoing chapter, where it was said to Zion, "Behold, thy salvation comes;" for here it is shown how it comes, *ver.* 1-6. II. God's people meeting him with their devotions, and addressing themselves to him with suitable affections; and this part of the chapter is carried on to the close of the next. In this we have, 1. A thankful acknowledgment of the great favours God had bestowed upon them, *ver.* 7. 2. The magnifying of these favours, from the consideration of God's relation to them (*ver.* 8), his compassionate concern for them (*ver.* 9), their unworthiness (*ver.* 10), and the occasion which it gave both him and them to call to mind former mercies, *ver.* 11-14. 3. A very humble and earnest prayer to God to appear for them in their present distress, pleading God's mercy (*ver.* 15), their relation to him (*ver.* 16), their desire towards him (*ver.* 17), and the insolence of their enemies, *ver.* 18, 19. So that, upon the whole, we learn to embrace God's promises with an active faith, and then to improve them, and make use of them, both in prayers and praises.

WHO is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in right-



eousness, mighty to save. 2 Wherefore *art thou* red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the wine-fat? 3 I have trodden the wine-press alone; and of the people *there was* none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. 4 For the day of vengeance *is* in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed *is* come. 5 And I looked, and *there was* none to help; and I wondered that *there was* none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, it upheld me. 6 And I will tread down the people in mine anger, and make them drunk in my fury, and I will bring down their strength to the earth.

It is a glorious victory that is here enquired into first and then accounted for. 1. It is a victory obtained by the providence of God over the enemies of Israel; over the Babylonians (say some), whom Cyrus conquered and God by him, and they will have the prophet to make the first discovery of him in his triumphant return when he is in the country of Edom: but this can by no means be admitted, because the country of Babylon is always spoken of as the land of the north, whereas Edom lay south from Jerusalem, so that the conqueror would not return through that country; the victory therefore is obtained over the Edomites themselves, who had triumphed in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans (Ps. cxxxvii. 7) and cut off those who, making their way as far as they could from the enemy, escaped to the Edomites (Obad. 12, 13), and were therefore reckoned with when Babylon was; for no doubt that prophecy was accomplished, though we do not meet in history with the accomplishment of it (Jer. xlix. 13), *Bozrah shall become a desolation*. Yet this victory over Edom is put as an instance or specimen of the like victories obtained over other nations that had been enemies to Israel. This over the Edomites is named for the sake of the old enmity of Esau against Jacob (Gen. xxvii. 41) and perhaps with an allusion to David's glorious triumphs over the Edomites, by which it should seem, more than by any other of his victories, he *got himself a name*, Ps. lx., *title*, 2 Sam. viii. 13, 14. But this is not all: 2. It is a victory obtained by the grace of God in Christ over our spiritual enemies. We find the garments dipped in blood adorning him whose name is called *The Word of God*, Rev. xix. 13. And who that is we know

very well; for it is through him that we are more than conquerors over those principalities and powers which on the cross he spoiled and triumphed over.

In this representation of the victory we have,

I. An admiring question put to the conqueror, v. 1, 2. It is put by the church, or by the prophet in the name of the church. He sees a mighty hero returning in triumph from a bloody engagement, and makes bold to ask him two questions:—1. Who he is. He observes him to come from the country of Edom, to come in such apparel as was glorious to a soldier, not embroidered or laced, but besmeared with blood and dirt. He observes that he does not come as one either frightened or fatigued, but that he *travels in the greatness of his strength*, altogether unbroken.

Triumphant and victorious he appears, And honour in his looks and habit wears.

How strong he treads! how stately doth he go! Pompous and solemn is his pace, And full of majesty, as is his face;

Who is this mighty hero—who?—Mr. NORRIS.

The question, *Who is this?* perhaps means the same with that which Joshua put to the same person when he appeared to him with his sword drawn (Josh. v. 13): *Art thou for us or for our adversaries?* Or, rather, the same with that which Israel put in a way of adoration (Exod. xv. 11): *Who is a God like unto thee?* 2. The other question is, *Wherefore art thou red in thy apparel?* What hard service hast thou been engaged in, that thou carriest with thee these marks of toil and danger? Is it possible that one who has such majesty and terror in his countenance should be employed in the mean and servile work of *treading the wine-press*? Surely it is not. That which is really the glory of the Redeemer seems, *primâ facie*—at first, a disparagement to him, as it would be to a mighty prince to do the work of the wine-dressers and husbandmen; for he *took upon him the form of a servant*, and carried with him the marks of servitude.

II. An admirable answer returned by him.

1. He tells who he is: *I 'hat speak in righteousness, mighty to save*. He is the Saviour. God was Israel's Saviour out of the hand of their oppressors; the Lord Jesus is ours; his name, *Jesus*, signifies a *Saviour*, for he *saves his people from their sins*. In the salvation wrought he will have us to take notice, (1.) Of the truth of his promise, which is therein performed: He *speaks in righteousness*, and will therefore make good every word that he has spoken with which he will have us to compare what he does, that, setting the word and the work the one over against the other, what he does may ratify what he has said and what he has said may justify what he does. (2.) Of the efficacy of his power, which is therein exerted.

He is *mighty to save*, able to bring about the promised redemption, whatever difficulties and oppositions may lie in the way of it.

'Tis I who to my promise faithful stand,

I, who the powers of death, hell, and the grave,  
Have foil'd with this all-conquering hand,

I, who most ready am, and mighty too, to save.

MR. NORRIS.

2. He tells how he came to appear in this hue (v. 3): *I have trodden the wine-press alone*. Being compared to one that treads in the wine-fat, such is his condescension, in the midst of his triumphs, that he does not scorn the comparison, but admits it and carries it on. He does indeed *tread the wine-press*, but it is the *great wine-press of the wrath of God* (Rev. xiv. 19), in which we sinners deserved to be cast; but Christ was pleased to cast our enemies into it, and to *destroy him that had the power of death*, that he might deliver us. And of this the bloody work which God sometimes made among the enemies of the Jews, and which is here foretold, was a type and figure. Observe the account the conqueror gives of his victory.

(1.) He gains the victory purely by his own strength: *I have trodden the wine-press alone*, v. 3. When God delivered his people and destroyed their enemies, if he made use of instruments, he did not need them. But among his people, for whom the salvation was to be wrought, no assistance offered itself; they were weak and helpless, and had no ability to do any thing for their own relief; they were desponding and listless, and had no heart to do any thing; they were not disposed to give the least stroke or struggle for liberty, neither the captives themselves nor any of their friends for them (v. 5): "*I looked, and there was none to help*, as one would have expected, nothing of a bold active spirit appeared among them; nay, there was not only none to lead, but, which was more strange, *there was none to uphold*, none that would come in as a second, that had the courage to join with Cyrus against their oppressors; *therefore my arm brought about the salvation; not by created might or power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts, my own arm*." Note, God can help when all other helpers fail; nay, that is his time to help, and therefore for that very reason he will put forth his own power so much the more gloriously. But this is most fully applicable to Christ's victories over our spiritual enemies, which he obtained by a single combat. He trod the wine-press of his Father's wrath alone, and triumphed over principalities and powers in himself, Col. ii. 15. *Of the people there was none with him*; for, when he entered the lists with the powers of darkness, *all his disciples forsook him and fled*. There was *none to help*, none that could, none that durst; and he might well wonder that among the children of men, whose concern it was, there was not only *none to uphold*, but that

there were so many to oppose and hinder it if they could.

(2.) He undertakes the war purely out of his own zeal. It is *in his anger*, it is *in his fury*, that he *treads down* his enemies (v. 3); and that *fury upholds him* and carries him on in this enterprise, v. 5. God wrought salvation for the oppressed Jews purely because he was very angry with the oppressing Babylonians, angry at their idolatries and sorceries, their pride and cruelty, and the injuries they did to his people, and, as they increased their abominations and grew more insolent and outrageous, his anger increased to fury. Our Lord Jesus wrought out our redemption in a holy zeal for the honour of his Father and the happiness of mankind, and a holy indignation at the daring attempts Satan had made upon both; this zeal and indignation upheld him throughout his whole undertaking. Two branches there were of this zeal that animated him:—[1.] He had a zeal against his and his people's enemies: *The day of vengeance is in my heart* (v. 4), the day fixed in the eternal counsels for taking vengeance on them; this was written in his heart, so that he could not forget it, could not let it slip; his heart was full of it, and it lay as a charge, as a weight, upon him, which made him push on this holy war with so much vigour. Note, There is a day fixed for divine vengeance, which may be long deferred, but will come at last; and we may be content to wait for it, for the Redeemer himself does so, though his heart is upon it. [2.] He had a zeal for his people, and for all that he designed to make sharers in the intended salvation: "*The year of my redeemed has come*, the year appointed for their redemption." There was a year fixed for the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, and God kept time to a day (Exod. xii. 41); so there was for their release out of Babylon (Dan. ix. 2); so there was for Christ's coming to destroy the works of the devil; so there is for all the deliverances of the church, and the deliverer has an eye to it. Observe, *First*, With what pleasure he speaks of his people; they are his *redeemed*; they are his own, dear to him. Though their redemption is not yet wrought out, yet he calls them *his redeemed*, because it shall as surely be done as if it were done already. *Secondly*, With what pleasure he speaks of his people's redemption; how glad he is that *the time has come*, though he is likely to meet with a sharp encounter. "Now that the year of my redeemed has come, *Lo, I come*; delay shall be no longer. *Now will I arise*, saith the Lord. *Now thou shalt see what I will do to Pharaoh*." Note, The promised salvation must be patiently waited for till the time appointed comes; yet we must attend the promises with our prayers. Does Christ say, *Surely I come quickly*; let our hearts reply, *Even so come*; let the year of the redeemed come.



(3.) He will obtain a complete victory over them all. [1.] Much is already done; for he now appears *red in his apparel*; such abundance of blood is shed that the conqueror's garments are all stained with it. This was predicted, long before, by dying Jacob, concerning *Shiloh* (that is, *Christ*), that he should *wash his garments in wine and his clothes in the blood of grapes*, which perhaps this alludes to, Gen. xlix. 11.

With ornamental drops bedeck'd I stood,  
And wrote my vict'ry with my en'my's blood.

MR. NORRIS.

In the destruction of the antichristian powers we meet with abundance of blood shed (Rev. xiv. 20, xix. 13), which yet, according to the dialect of prophecy, may be understood spiritually, and doubtless so may this here. [2.] More shall yet be done (v. 6): *I will tread down the people that yet stand it out against me, in my anger*; for the victorious Redeemer, when the *year of the redeemed shall have come*, will go on *conquering and to conquer*, Rev. vi. 2. When he begins he will also make an end. Observe how he will complete his victories over the enemies of his church. *First*, He will infatuate them; he will make them drunk, so that there shall be neither sense nor steadiness in their counsels; they shall drink of the cup of his fury, and that shall intoxicate them: or he will make them *drunk with their own blood*, Rev. xvii. 6. Let those that make themselves drunk with the cup of riot (and then they are in their fury) repent and reform, lest God make them drunk with the *cup of trembling*, the cup of his fury. *Secondly*, He will enfeeble them; he will *bring down their strength*, and so bring them down to the earth; for what strength can hold out against Omnipotence?

7 I will mention the loving-kindnesses of the LORD, *and* the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his loving-kindnesses. 8 For he said, Surely they *are* my people, children that will not lie: so he was their Saviour. 9 In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old. 10 But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, *and* he fought against them. 11 Then he remembered the days of

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old, Moses, *and* his people, *saying*, Where *is* he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? Where *is* he that put his holy Spirit within him? 12 That led *them* by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name? 13 That led them through the deep, as a horse in the wilderness, *that* they should not stumble? 14 As a beast goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the LORD caused him to rest: so didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name.

The prophet is here, in the name of the church, taking a review, and making a thankful recognition, of God's dealings with his church all along, ever since he founded it, before he comes, in the latter end of this chapter and in the next, as a watchman upon the walls, earnestly to pray to God for his compassion towards her in her present deplorable state; and it was usual for God's people, in their prayers, thus to look back.

I. Here is a general acknowledgment of God's goodness to them all along, v. 7. It was said, in general, of God's prophets and people (ch. lxii. 6) that they *made mention of the Lord*; now here we are told what it is in God that they do especially delight to make mention of, and that is his goodness, which the prophet here so makes mention of as if he thought he could never say enough of it. He mentions the *kindness of God* (which never appeared so evident, so eminent, as in his love to mankind in *sending his Son* to save us, Tit. iii. 4), his loving-kindness, kindness that shows itself in every thing that is endearing; nay, so plenteous are the springs, and so various the streams, of divine mercy, that he speaks of it in the plural number—*his loving-kindnesses*; for, if we would count the fruits of his loving-kindness, they are *more in number than the sand*. With his loving-kindnesses he mentions his *praises*, that is, the thankful acknowledgments which the saints make of his loving-kindness, and the angels too. It must be mentioned, to God's honour, what a tribute of praise is paid to him by all his creatures in consideration of his loving-kindness. See how copiously he speaks, 1. Of the goodness that is from God, the gifts of his loving-kindness—all that the Lord has bestowed on us in particular, relating to life and godliness, in our personal and family capacity. Let every man speak for himself, speak as he has found, and he must own that he has had a great deal bestowed upon him by the divine bounty. But we must also mention the favours bestowed upon his church, his great

goodness towards the house of Israel, which he has bestowed on them. Note, We must bless God for the mercies enjoyed by others as well as for those enjoyed by ourselves, and reckon that bestowed on ourselves which is bestowed on the house of Israel. 2. Of the goodness that is in God. God does good because he is good; what he bestowed upon us must be traced up to the original; it is according to his mercies (not according to our merits) and according to the multitude of his loving-kindnesses, which can never be spent. Thus we should magnify God's goodness, and speak honourably of it, not only when we plead it (as David, Ps. li. 1), but when we praise it.

II. Here is particular notice taken of the steps of God's mercy to Israel ever since it was formed into a nation.

1. The expectations God had concerning them that they would conduct themselves well, v. 8. When he brought them out of Egypt and took them into covenant with himself he said, "*Surely they are my people, I take them as such, and am willing to hope they will approve themselves so, children that will not lie,*" that will not *dissemble with God* in their covenantings with him, nor treacherously depart from him by breaking their covenant and starting aside like a broken bow. They said, more than once, *All that the Lord shall say unto us we will do and will be obedient*; and thereupon he took them to be his peculiar people, saying, *Surely they will not lie*. God deals fairly and faithfully with them, and therefore expects they should deal so with him. They are *children of the covenant* (Acts iii. 25), children of those that clave unto the Lord, and therefore it may be hoped that they will tread in the steps of their fathers' constancy. Note, God's people are *children that will not lie*; for those that will are not his children but the devil's.

2. The favour he showed them with an eye to these expectations: *So he was their Saviour* out of the bondage of Egypt and all the calamities of their wilderness-state, and many a time since he had been their Saviour. See particularly (v. 9) what he did for them as their Saviour. (1.) The principle that moved him to work salvation for them; it was *in his love and in his pity*, out of mere compassion to them and a tender affection for them, not because he either needed them or could be benefited by them. This is strangely expressed here: *In all their affliction he was afflicted*; not that the Eternal Mind is capable of grieving or God's infinite blessedness of suffering the least damage or diminution (God cannot be afflicted); but thus he is pleased to show forth the love and concern he has for his people in their affliction; thus far he sympathizes with them, that he takes what injury is done to them as done to himself and will reckon for it accordingly. Their cries move him

(Exod. iii. 7), and he appears for them as vigorously as if he were pained in their pain. *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* This is matter of great comfort to God's people in their affliction that God is so far from *afflicting willingly* (Lam. iii. 33) that, if they humble themselves under his hand, he is *afflicted in their affliction*, as the tender parents are in the severe operations which the case of a sick child calls for. There is another reading of these words in the original: *In all their affliction there was no affliction*; though they were in great affliction, yet the property of it was so altered by the grace of God sanctifying it to them for their good, the rigour of it was so mitigated and it was so allayed and balanced with mercies, they were so wonderfully supported and comforted under it, and it proved so short, and ended so well, that it was in effect no affliction. The troubles of the saints are not that to them which they are to others; they are not afflictions, but medicines; saints are enabled to call them *light*, and *but for a moment*, and, with an eye to heaven as all in all, to make nothing of them.

(2.) The person employed in their salvation—the *angel of his face*, or presence. Some understand it of a created angel. The highest angel in heaven, even the angel of his presence, that attends next the throne of his glory, is not thought too great, too good, to be sent on this errand. Thus the little ones' angels are said to be those that *always behold the face of our Father*, Matt. xviii. 10. But this is rather to be understood of Jesus Christ, the eternal Word, that angel of whom God spoke to Moses (Exod. xxiii. 20, 21), whose voice Israel was to obey. He is called *Jehovah*, Exod. xiii. 21; xiv. 21, 24. He is the angel of the covenant, God's messenger to the world, Mal. iii. 1. He is the *angel of God's face*, for he is the *express image of his person*; and the glory of God shines in the face of Christ. He that was to work out the eternal salvation, as an earnest of that, wrought out the temporal salvations that were typical of it. (3.) The progress and perseverance of this favour. He not only redeemed them out of their bondage, but *he bore them and carried them all the days of old*; they were weak, but he supported them by his power, sustained them by his bounty; when they were burdened, and ready to sink, he bore them up; in the wars they made upon the nations he stood by them and bore them out; though they were peevish, he bore with them and suffered their manners, Acts xiii. 18. He carried them as the nursing father does the child, though they would have tired any arms but his; he carried them as the eagle her young upon her wings, Deut. xxxii. 11. And it was a long time that he was *troubled with them* (if we may so speak): it was *all the days of old*; his care of them was not at an end even when they had grown up and were settled in Canaan. All this was



*in his love and pity, ex mero motu—of his mere good-will*; he loved them because he would love them, as he says, Deut. vii. 7, 8.

3. Their disingenuous conduct towards him, and the trouble they thereby brought upon themselves (v. 10): *But they rebelled*. Things looked very hopeful and promising; one would have thought that they should have continued dutiful children to God, and then there was no doubt but he would have continued a gracious Father to them; but here is a sad change on both sides, and *on them be the breach*. (1.) They revolted from their allegiance to God and took up arms against him: *They rebelled, and vexed his Holy Spirit* with their unbelief and murmuring, besides the iniquity of the golden calf; and this had been their way and manner ever since. Though he was ready to say of them, *They will not lie*, though he had done so much for them, *borne them and carried them*, yet they thus ill requited him, like *foolish people and unwise*, Deut. xxxii. 6. This grieved him, Ps. xcv. 10. The ungrateful rebellions of God's children against him are a vexation to his Holy Spirit. (2.) Thereupon he justly withdrew his protection, and not only so, but made war upon them, as a prince justly does upon the rebels. He who had been so much their friend was *turned to be their enemy and fought against them*, by one judgment after another, both in the wilderness and after their settlement in Canaan. See the malignity and mischievousness of sin; it makes God an enemy even to those for whom he has done the part of a good friend, and makes him angry who was all love and pity. See the folly of sinners; they wilfully lose him for a friend who is the most desirable friend, and make him their enemy who is the most formidable enemy. This refers especially to those calamities that were of late brought upon them by their captivity in Babylon for their idolatries and other sins. That which is both the original and the great aggravation of their troubles was that God was *turned to be their enemy*.

4. A particular reflection made, on this occasion, upon what God did for them when he first formed them into a people: *Then he remembered the days of old*, v. 11.

(1.) This may be understood either of the people or of God. [1.] We may understand it of the people. Israel then (spoken of as a single person) *remembered the days of old*, looked into their Bibles, read the story of God's bringing their fathers out of Egypt, considered it more closely than ever they did before, and reasoned upon it, as Gideon did (Judg. vi. 13), *Where are all the wonders that our fathers told us of?* "*Where is he that brought them up out of Egypt?* Is he not as able to bring us up out of Babylon? *Where is the Lord God of Elijah?* *Where is the Lord God of our fathers?*" This they consider as an inducement and an encour-

agement to them to repent and return to him; their fathers were a provoking people and yet found him a pardoning God; and why may not they find him so if they return to him? They also use it as a plea with God in prayer for the turning again of their captivity, like that ch. li. 9, 10. Note, When the present days are dark and cloudy it is good to *remember the days of old*, to recollect our own and others' experiences of the divine power and goodness and make use of them, to look back upon *the years of the right hand of the Most High* (Ps. lxxvii. 5, 10), and remember that he is God, and *changes not*. [2.] We may understand it of God; he put himself in mind of the days of old, of his covenant with Abraham (Lev. xxvi. 42); he said, *Where is he that brought Israel up out of the sea?* stirring up himself to come and save them with this consideration, "Why should not I appear for them now as I did for their fathers, who were as undeserving, as ill-deserving, as they are?" See how far off divine mercy will go, how far back it will look, to find out a reason for doing good to his people, when no present considerations appear but what make against them. Nay, it makes that a reason for relieving them which might have been used as a reason for abandoning them. He might have said, "I have delivered them formerly, but they have again brought trouble upon themselves (Prov. xix. 19); therefore *I will deliver them no more*," Judg. x. 13. But no; mercy rejoices against judgment, and turns the argument the other way: "I have formerly delivered them and therefore will now."

(2.) Which way soever we take it, whether the people plead it with God or God with himself, let us view the particulars, and they agree very much with the confession and prayer which the children of the captivity made upon a solemn fast-day (Neh. ix. 5. &c.), which may serve as a comment on these verses which call to mind *Moses and his people*, that is, what God did by *Moses* for his people, especially in bringing them through the Red Sea, for that is it that is here most insisted on; for it was a work which he much gloried in and which his people therefore may in a particular manner encourage themselves with the remembrance of.

[1.] *God led them by the right hand of Moses* (v. 12) and the wonder-working rod in his hand. Ps. lxxvii. 20, *Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses*. It was not Moses that led them, any more than it was Moses that fed them (John vi. 32), but God by Moses; for it was he that qualified Moses for, called him to, assisted and prospered him in that great undertaking. Moses is here called *the shepherd of his flock*; God was the owner of the flock and the chief shepherd of Israel (Ps. lxxx. 1); but Moses was a shepherd under him, and he was inured to labour and patience, and so fitted for this pastoral care, by his being trained up to *keep the flock*

of his father Jethro. Herein he was a type of Christ the good shepherd, that *lays down his life for the sheep*, which was more than Moses did for Israel, though he did a great deal for them. [2.] He put his holy Spirit within him; the Spirit of God was among them, and not only his providence, but his grace, did work for them. Neh. ix. 20, *Thou gavest thy good Spirit to instruct them.* The Spirit of wisdom and courage, as well as the Spirit of prophecy, was put into Moses, to qualify him for that service among them to which he was called; and some of his spirit was put upon the seventy elders, Num. xi. 17. This was a great blessing to Israel, that they had among them not only inspired writings, but inspired men. [3.] He carried them safely through the Red Sea, and thereby saved them out of the hands of Pharaoh. *First, He divided the water before them* (v. 12), so that it gave them not only passage, but protection, not only opened them a lane, but erected them a wall on either side. *Secondly, He led them through the deep as a horse in the wilderness, or in the plain* (v. 13); they and their wives and children, with all their baggage, went as easily and readily through the bottom of the sea (though we may suppose it muddy or stony, or both) as a horse goes along upon even ground; so that they did not stumble, though it was an untrodden path, which neither they nor any one else ever went before. If God make us a way, he will make it plain and level; the road he opens to his people he will lead them in. *Thirdly, To complete the mercy, he brought them up out of the sea*, v. 11. Though the ascent, it is likely, was very steep, dirty, slippery, and unconquerable (at least by the women and children, and the men, considering how they were loaded, Exod. xii. 34, and how fatigued), yet God by his power brought them up from the depths of the earth; and it was a kind of resurrection to them; it was as *life from the dead*. [4.] He brought them safely to a place of rest: *As a beast goes down into the valley*, carefully and gradually, so the Spirit of the Lord caused him to rest. Many a time in their march through the wilderness they had resting-places provided for them by the direction of the Spirit of the Lord in Moses, v. 11. And at length they were made to rest finally in Canaan, and the Spirit of the Lord gave them that rest according to the promise. It is by the Spirit of the Lord that God's Israel are caused to return to God and repose in him as their rest. [5.] All this he did for them by his own power, for his own praise. *First*, It was by his own power, as the God of nature, that has all the powers of nature at his command; he did it with his glorious arm, *the arm of his gallantry, or bravery*; so the word signifies. It was not Moses's rod, but God's glorious arm, that did it. *Secondly*, It was for his own praise, to make himself an everlasting name (v. 12), a glorious name (v.

14), that he might be glorified, everlastingly glorified, upon this account. This is that which God is doing in the world with his glorious arm, he is making to himself a glorious name, and it shall last to endless ages, when the most celebrated names of the great ones of the earth shall be written in the dust.

15 Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory: where *is* thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels and of thy mercies toward me? Are they restrained? 16 Doubtless thou *art* our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O LORD, *art* our father, our Redeemer; thy name *is* from everlasting. 17 O LORD, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear? Return for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance. 18 The people of thy holiness have possessed *it* but a little while: our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary. 19 We are *thine*: thou never barest rule over them; they were not called by thy name.

The foregoing praises were intended as an introduction to this prayer, which is continued to the end of the next chapter, and it is an affectionate, importunate, pleading prayer. It is calculated for the time of the captivity. As they had promises, so they had prayers, prepared for them against that time of need, that they might take with them words in turning to the Lord, and say unto him what he himself taught them to say, in which they might the better hope to prevail, the words being of God's own inditing. Some good interpreters think this prayer looks further, and that it expresses the complaints of the Jews under their last and final rejection from God and destruction by the Romans; for there is one passage in it (ch. lxiv. 4) which is applied to the grace of the gospel by the apostle (1 Cor. ii. 9), that grace for the rejecting of which they were rejected. In these verses we may observe,

I. The petitions they put up to God. 1. That he would take cognizance of their case and of the desires of their souls towards him: *Look down from heaven, and behold*, v. 15. They knew very well that God sees all, but they prayed that he would regard them, would condescend to favour them, would look upon them with an eye of compassion and concern, as he looked upon the affliction of his people in Egypt when he was about to appear for their deliverance. In begging that he would only look down upon them



and behold them: they did in effect appeal to his justice against their enemies, and pray for judgment against them (as Jehoshaphat, 2 Chron. xx. 11, 12, *Behold, how they reward us. Wilt thou not judge them?*), implicitly confiding in his mercy and wisdom as to the way in which he will relieve them (Ps. xxv. 18, *Look upon my affliction and my pain*): *Look down from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory.* God's holiness is his glory. Heaven is his habitation, the throne of his glory, where he most manifests his glory, and whence he is said to look down upon this earth, Ps. xxxiii. 14. His holiness is in a special manner celebrated there by the blessed angels (ch. vi. 3; Rev. iv. 8); there his holy ones attend him, and are continually about him; so that it is the *habitation of his holiness*. It is an encouragement to all his praying people, who desire to be holy as he is holy, that he *dwells in a holy place*. 2. That he would take a course for their relief (v. 17): "*Return*": change thy way towards us, and proceed not in thy controversy with us; return in mercy, and let us have not only a gracious look towards us, but thy gracious presence with us." God's people dread nothing more than his departures from them and desire nothing more than his returns to them.

II. The complaints they made to God. Two things they complained of:—1. That they were given up to themselves, and God's grace did not recover them, v. 17. It is a strange expostulation, "*Why hast thou made us to err from thy ways*, that is, many among us, the generality of us; and this complaint we have all of us some cause to make that *thou hast hardened our heart from thy fear*. Some make it to be the language of those among them that were impious and profane; when the prophets reproved them for the *error of their ways, their hardness of heart, and contempt of God's word and commandments*, they with a daring impudence charged their sin upon God, made him the author of it, and asked *why doth he then find fault?* Note, Those are wicked indeed that lay the blame of their wickedness upon God. But I rather take it to be the language of those among them that lamented the unbelief and impenitence of their people, not accusing God of being the author of their wickedness, but complaining of it to him. They owned that they had *erred from God's ways*, that their hearts had been *hardened from his fear*, that they had not received the impressions which the fear of God ought to make upon them and this was the cause of all their errors from his ways; or *from his fear* may mean from the true worship of God, and that is a hard heart indeed which is alienated from the service of a God so incontestably great and good. Now this they complain of, as their great misery and burden, that God had for their sins left them to this, had permitted them to *err from his ways* and had

justly withheld his grace, so that their hearts were *hardened from his fear*. When they ask, *Why hast thou done this?* it is not as charging him with wrong, but lamenting it as a sore judgment. God had *caused them to err and hardened their hearts*, not only by withdrawing his Spirit from them, because they had grieved, and vexed, and quenched him (v. 10), but by a judicial sentence upon them (*Go, make the heart of this people fat*, ch. vi. 9, 10) and by his providences concerning them, which had proved sad occasions for their departure from him. David complains of his banishment, because in it he was in effect bidden to *go and serve other gods*, 1 Sam. xxvi. 19. Their troubles had alienated many of them from God, and prejudiced them against his service; and, because the *rod of the wicked had lain long on their lot*, they were ready to *put forth their hand unto iniquity* (Ps. cxv. 3), and this was the thing they complained most of; their afflictions were their temptations, and to many of them invincible ones. Note, Convinced consciences complain most of spiritual judgments and dread that most in an affliction which draws them from God and duty. 2. That they were given up to their enemies, and God's providence did not rescue and relieve them (v. 18): *Our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary*. As it was a grief to them that in their captivity the generality of them had lost their affection to God's worship, and had their hearts hardened from it by their affliction, so it was a further grief that they were deprived of their opportunities of worshipping God in solemn assemblies. They complained not so much of the adversaries treading down their houses and cities as of their treading down God's sanctuary, because thereby God was immediately affronted, and they were robbed of the comforts they valued most and took most pleasure in.

III. The pleas they urged with God for mercy and deliverance. 1. They pleaded the tender compassion God used to show to his people and his ability and readiness to appear for them, v. 15. The most prevailing arguments in prayer are those that are taken *from God himself*; such these are. *Where is thy zeal and thy strength?* God has a zeal for his own glory, and for the comfort of his people; his name is *Jealous*; and he is a jealous God; and he has strength proportionable to secure his own glory and the interest of his people, in despite of all opposition. Now where are these? Have they not formerly appeared? Why do they not appear now? It cannot be that divine zeal, which is infinitely wise and just, should be cooled, that divine strength, which is infinite, should be weakened. Nay, his people had experienced not only *his zeal and his strength*, but the *sounding of his bowels*, or rather the yearning of them, such a degree of compassion to them as in men causes a commotion and agitation within them, as Hos. xi. 8, *My*



heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together; and Jer. xxxi. 20, *My bowels are troubled* (or sound) *for him*. "Thus God used to be affected towards his people, and to express a multitude of mercies towards them; but where are they now? Are they restrained? Ps. lxxvii. 9. Has God, who so often remembered to be gracious, now forgotten to be so? *Has he in anger shut up his tender mercies?* It can never be." Note, We may ground good expectations of further mercy upon our experiences of former mercy. 2. They pleaded God's relation to them as their Father (v. 16): "Thy tender mercies are not restrained, for they are the tender mercies of a father, who, though he may be for a time displeased with his child, will yet, through the force of natural affection, soon be reconciled. Doubtless thou art our Father, and therefore thy bowels will yearn towards us." Such good thoughts of God as these we should always keep up in our hearts. However it be, yet God is good; for he is our Father. They own themselves fatherless if he be not their Father, and so cast themselves upon him with whom the fatherless findeth mercy, Hos. xiv. 3. It was the honour of their nation that they had Abraham to their father (Matt. iii. 9), who was the friend of God, and Israel, who was a prince with God; but what the better were they for that unless they had God himself for their Father? "Abraham and Israel cannot help us; they have not the power that God has; they are dead long since, and are ignorant of us, and acknowledge us not; they know not what our case is, nor what our wants are, and therefore know not which way to do us a kindness. If Abraham and Israel were alive with us, they would intercede for us and advise us; but they have gone to the other world, and we know not that they have any communication at all with this world, and therefore they are not capable of doing us any kindness any further than that we have the honour of being called their children." When the father is dead his sons come to honour and he knows it not, Job xiv. 21. "But thou, O Lord! art our Father still (the fathers of our flesh may call themselves ever-loving; but they are not ever-living; it is God only that is the immortal Father, that always knows us, and is never at a distance from us), and therefore our Redeemer from everlasting is thy name, the name by which we will know and own thee. It is the name by which from of old thou hast been known; thy people have always looked upon thee as the God to whom they might appeal to redress their grievances and plead their cause. Nay" (according to the sense some give of this place), "though Abraham and Israel not only cannot, but would not, help us, thou wilt. They have not the pity thou hast. We are so degenerate and corrupt that Abraham and Israel would not own us for their children, yet we fly to thee as our Father. Abraham cast out his son Ishmael; Jacob disin-

herited his son Reuben and cursed Simeon and Levi; but our heavenly Father, in pardoning sin, is God, and not man," Hos. xi. 9. 3. They pleaded God's interest in them, that he was their Lord, their owner and proprietor. "We are thy servants; what service we can do thou art entitled to, and therefore we ought not to serve strange kings and strange gods: *Return for thy servants' sake.*" As a father finds himself obliged by natural affection to relieve and protect his child, so a master thinks himself obliged in honour to rescue and protect his servant: "We are thine by the strongest engagements, as well as the highest endearments. Thou hast borne rule over us; therefore, Lord, assert thy own interest, maintain thy own right; for we are called by thy name, and therefore whither shall we go but to thee, to be righted and protected? *We are thine, save us* (Ps. cxix. 94), thy own, acknowledge us. We are the tribes of thy inheritance, not only thy servants, but thy tenants; we are thine, not only to do work for thee, but to pay rent to thee. The tribes of Israel are God's inheritance, whence issue the little praise and worship that he receives from this lower world; and wilt thou suffer thy own servants and tenants to be thus abused?" 4. They pleaded that they had had but a short enjoyment of the land of promise and the privileges of the sanctuary (v. 18): *The people of thy holiness have possessed it but a little while*. From Abraham to David were but fourteen generations, and from David to the captivity but fourteen more (Matt. i. 17), and that was but a little while in comparison with what might have been expected from the promise of the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession (Gen. xlvii. 8) and from the power that was put forth to bring them into that land and settle them in it. "Though we are the people of thy holiness, distinguished from other people and consecrated to thee, yet we are soon dislodged." But this they might thank themselves for; they were, in profession, the people of God's holiness, but it was their wickedness that turned them out of the possession of that land. 5. They pleaded that those who had and kept possession of their land were such as were strangers to God, such as he had no service or honour from: "Thou never didst bear rule over them, nor did they ever yield thee any obedience; they were not called by thy name, but professed relation to other gods and were the worshippers of them. Will God suffer those that do not stand in any relation to him to trample upon those that do?" Some give another reading of this: "We have become as those over whom thou didst never bear rule and who were never called by thy name; we are rejected and abandoned, despised and trampled upon, as if we never had been in thy service nor had thy name called upon us." Thus the shield of Saul



was vilely cast away, as though he had not been anointed with oil. But the covenant that seems to be forgotten shall be remembered again.

## CHAP. LXIV.

This chapter goes on with that pathetic pleading prayer which the church offered up to God in the latter part of the foregoing chapter. They had argued from their covenant-relation to God and his interest and concern in them; now here, I. They pray that God would appear in some remarkable and surprising manner for them against his and their enemies, ver. 1, 2. II. They plead what God had formerly done, and was always ready to do, for his people, ver. 3-5. III. They confess themselves to be sinful and unworthy of God's favour, and that they had deserved the judgments they were now under, ver. 6, 7. IV. They refer themselves to the mercy of God as a Father, and submit themselves to his sovereignty, ver. 8. V. They represent the very deplorable condition they were in, and earnestly pray for the pardon of sin and the turning away of God's anger, ver. 9-12. And this was not only intended for the use of the captive Jews, but may serve for direction to the church in other times of distress, what to ask of God and how to plead with him. Are God's people at any time in affliction, in great affliction? Let them pray, let them thus pray.

**O**H that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence, 2 As when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence! 3 When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, thou camest down, the mountains flowed down at thy presence. 4 For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him. 5 Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember thee in thy ways: behold, thou art wroth; for we have sinned: in those is continuance, and we shall be saved.

Here, I. The petition is that God would appear wonderfully for them now, v. 1, 2. Their case was represented in the close of the foregoing chapter as very sad and very hard, and in this case it was time to cry, "Help, Lord; O that God would manifest his zeal and his strength!" They had prayed (ch. lxiii. 15) that God would *look down from heaven*; here they pray that he would come down to deliver them, as he had said, Exod. iii. 8. 1. They desire that God would in his providence manifest himself both to them and for them. When God works some extraordinary deliverance for his people he is said to *shine forth*, to show himself strong; so, here, they pray that he would *rend the heavens and come down*, as when he delivered David he is said to *bow the heavens, and come down* (Ps. xviii. 9), to display his power, and justice, and goodness, in an extraordinary

manner, so that all may take notice of them and acknowledge them. This God's people desire and pray for, that they themselves having the satisfaction of seeing him though his way be in the sea, others may be made to see him when his way is in the clouds. This is applicable to the second coming of Christ, when *the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout. Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly.* 2. They desire that he would vanquish all opposition and that it might be made to give way before him: *That the mountains might flow down at thy presence*, that the fire of thy wrath may burn so fiercely against thy enemies as even to dissolve the rockiest mountains and melt them down before it, as metal in the furnace, which is made liquid and cast into what shape the operator pleases; so *the melting fire burns, v. 2.* Let things be put into a ferment, in order to a glorious revolution in favour of the church: *As the fire causes the waters to boil.* There is an allusion here, some think, to the volcanoes, or burning mountains, which sometimes send forth such sulphureous streams as make the adjacent rivers and seas to boil, which, perhaps, are left as sensible intimations of the power of God's wrath and warning-pieces of the final conflagration. 3. They desire that this may tend very much to the glory and honour of God, *may make his name known*, not only to his friends (they knew it before, and trusted in his power), but to his adversaries likewise, that they may know it and *tremble at his presence*, and may say, with the men of Bethshemesh, *Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God? Who knows the power of his anger?* Note, Sooner or later God will make his name known to his adversaries and force those to *tremble at his presence* that would not come and worship in his presence. God's name, if it be not a stronghold for us, into which we may run and be safe, will be a stronghold against us, out of the reach of which we cannot run and be safe. The day will come when nations shall be made to tremble at the presence of God, though they be ever so numerous and strong.

II. The plea is that God had appeared wonderfully for his people formerly; and *thou hast, therefore thou wilt*, is good arguing at the throne of grace, Ps. x. 17.

1. They plead what he had done for his people Israel in particular when he brought them out of Egypt, v. 3. He then *did terrible things* in the plagues of Egypt, *which they looked not for*; they despaired of deliverance, so far were they from any thought of being delivered with such a high hand and outstretched arm. Then he came down upon Mount Sinai in such terror as made that and the adjacent mountains to *flow down at his presence*, to *skip like rams* (Ps. cxiv. 4), to tremble, so that they were scattered and the perpetual hills were made to bow, Hab.

iii. 6. In the many great salvations God wrought for that people he did *terrible things which they looked not for*, made great men, that seemed as stately and strong as mountains, to fall before him, and great opposition to give way. See Judg. v. 4, 5; Ps. lxxiii. 7, 8. Some refer this to the defeat of Sennacherib's powerful army, which was as surprising an instance of the divine power as the melting down of rocks and mountains would be.

2. They plead what God had been used to do, and had declared his gracious purpose to do, for his people in general. The provision he has made for the safety and happiness of his people, even of all those that seek him, and serve him, and trust in him, is very rich and very ready, so that they need not fear being either disappointed of it, for it is sure, or disappointed in it, for it is sufficient.

(1.) It is very rich, v. 4. Men have not heard nor seen what God has *prepared for those that wait for him*. Observe the character of God's people; they are such as wait for him in the way of duty, wait for the salvation he has promised and designed for them. Observe where the happiness of this people is bound up; it is *what God has prepared for them*, what he has designed for them in his counsel and is in his providence and grace preparing for them and preparing them for, what he has *done or will do*, so it may be read. Some of the Jewish doctors have understood this of the blessings reserved for the days of the Messiah, and to them the apostle applies these words; and others extend them to the glories of the world to come. It is all that goodness which God has *laid up for those that fear him, and wrought for those that trust in him*, Ps. xxxi. 19. Of this it is here said that *since the beginning of the world*, in the most prying and inquisitive ages of it, men have not, either by hearing or seeing, the two learning senses, come to the full knowledge of it. None have seen, nor heard, nor can understand, but God himself, what the provision is that is made for the present and future felicity of holy souls. For, [1.] Much of it was concealed in former ages; they knew it not, because the *unsearchable riches of Christ were hidden in God*, were *hidden from the wise and prudent*; but in latter ages they were revealed by the gospel; so the apostle applies this (1 Cor. ii. 9), for it follows (v. 10), *But God has revealed them unto us by his Spirit*; compare Rom. xvi. 25, 26, with Eph. iii. 9. That which men had not heard *since the beginning of the world* they should hear before the end of it, and at the end of it should see, when the veil shall be rent to introduce the glory that is yet to be revealed. God himself knew what he had in store for believers, but none knew besides him. [2.] It cannot be fully comprehended by the human understanding, no,

not when it is revealed; it is spiritual, and refined from those ideas which our minds are most apt to receive in this world of sense; it is very great, and will far outdo the utmost of our expectations. Even the present peace of believers, much more their future bliss, is such as surpasses all conception and expression, Phil. iv. 7. None can comprehend it but God himself, whose understanding is infinite. Some give another reading of these words, referring the transcendency, not so much to the work itself as to the author of it: *Neither has the eye seen a god besides thee, who doth so* (or has done or can do so) *for him that waits for him*. We must infer from God's works of wondrous grace, as well as from his works of wondrous power, from the kind things, as well as from the great things, he does, that there is *no god like him*, nor any among the sons of the mighty to be compared with him.

(2.) It is very ready (v. 5): "*Thou meetest him that rejoices and works righteousness, meetest him with that good which thou hast prepared for him* (v. 4), and dost not forget *those that remember thee in thy ways*." See here what communion there is between a gracious God and a gracious soul. [1.] What God expects from us, in order to our having communion with him. *First*, We must make conscience of doing our duty in every thing, we must *work righteousness*, must do that which is good and which the Lord our God requires of us, and must do it well. *Secondly*, We must be cheerful in doing our duty, we must *rejoice and work righteousness*, must delight ourselves in God and in his law, must be cheerful in his service and sing at our work. God loves a cheerful giver, a cheerful worshipper. We must *serve the Lord with gladness*. *Thirdly*, We must conform ourselves to all the methods of his providence concerning us and be suitably affected with them, must *remember him in his ways*, in all the ways wherein he walks, whether he walks towards us or walks contrary to us. We must mind him and make mention of him with thanksgiving when his ways are ways of mercy (*in a day of prosperity be joyful*), with patience and submission when he contends with us. *In the way of thy judgments we have waited for thee*; for *in a day of adversity* we must *consider*. [2.] We are here told what we may expect from God if we thus attend him in the way of duty: *Thou meetest him*. This intimates the friendship, fellowship, and familiarity to which God admits his people; he meets them, to converse with them, to manifest himself to them, and to receive their addresses, Exod. xx. 24; xxix. 43. It likewise intimates his freeness and forwardness in doing them good; he will *anticipate them with the blessings of his goodness*, will *rejoice to do good* to those that *rejoice in working righteousness*, and wait to be gracious to those that *wait for him*. He meets his



penitent people with a pardon, as the father of the prodigal met his returning son, Luke xv. 20. He meets his praying people with an answer of peace, while they are yet speaking, *ch. lxxv. 24.*

3. They plead the unchangeableness of God's favour and the stability of his promise, notwithstanding the sins of his people and his displeasure against them for their sins: "*Behold, thou hast many a time been wroth with us because we have sinned, and we have been under the tokens of thy wrath; but in those, those ways of thine, the ways of mercy in which we have remembered thee, in those is continuance,*" or "*in those thou art ever*" (his mercy endures for ever), "*and therefore we shall at last be saved, though thou art wroth, and we have sinned.*" This agrees with the tenour of God's covenant, that, if we forsake the law, he will visit our transgression with a rod, but his loving-kindness he will not utterly take away, his covenant he will not break (Ps. lxxxix. 30, &c.), and by this his people have been many a time saved from ruin when they were just upon the brink of it; see Ps. lxxviii. 38. And by this continuance of the covenant we hope to be saved, for its being an everlasting covenant is all our salvation. Though God has been angry with us for our sins, and justly, yet his anger has endured but for a moment and has been soon over; but in his favour is life, because in it is continuance; in the ways of his favour he proceeds and perseveres, and on that we depend for our salvation, see *ch. liv. 7, 8.* It is well for us that our hopes of salvation are built not upon any merit or sufficiency of our own (for in that there is no certainty, even Adam in innocence did not abide), but upon God's mercies and promises, for in those, we are sure, is continuance.

6 But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. 7 And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities. 8 But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand. 9 Be not wroth very sore, O LORD, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people. 10 Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. 11 Our holy and our beautiful house, where

our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste. 12 Wilt thou refrain thyself for these things, O LORD? Wilt thou hold thy peace, and afflict us very sore?

As we have the Lamentations of Jeremiah, so here we have the Lamentations of Isaiah; the subject of both is the same—the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans and the sin of Israel that brought that destruction—only with this difference, Isaiah sees it at a distance and laments it by the Spirit of prophecy, Jeremiah saw it accomplished. In these verses,

I. The people of God in their affliction confess and bewail their sins, thereby justifying God in their afflictions, owning themselves unworthy of his mercy, and thereby both improving their troubles and preparing for deliverance. Now that they were under divine rebukes for sin they had nothing to trust to but the mere mercy of God and the continuance of that; for among themselves there is none to help, none to uphold, none to stand in the gap and make intercession, for they are all polluted with sin and therefore unworthy to intercede, all careless and remiss in duty and therefore unable and unfit to intercede.

1. There was a general corruption of manners among them (v. 6): *We are all as an unclean thing, or as an unclean person, as one overspread with a leprosy, who was to be shut out of the camp.* The body of the people were like one under a ceremonial pollution, who was not admitted into the courts of the tabernacle, or like one labouring under some loathsome disease, from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot *nothing but wounds and bruises, ch. i. 6.* We have all by sin become not only obnoxious to God's justice, but odious to his holiness; for sin is that *abominable thing which the Lord hates*, and cannot endure to look upon. *Even all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.* (1.) "The best of our persons are so; we are all so corrupt and polluted that even those among us who pass for righteous men, in comparison with what our fathers were who rejoiced and wrought righteousness (v. 5), are but as filthy rags, fit to be cast to the dung-hill. *The best of them is as a brier.*" (2.) "The best of our performances are so. There is not only a general corruption of manners, but a general defection in the exercises of devotion too; those which pass for the sacrifices of righteousness, when they come to be enquired into, are the torn, and the lame, and the sick, and therefore are provoking to God, as nauseous as filthy rags." Our performances, though they be ever so plausible, if we depend upon them as our righteousness and think to merit by them at God's hand, are as filthy rags—rags,

and will not cover us—filthy rags, and will but defile us. True penitents cast away their idols as filthy rags (*ch. xxx. 22*), odious in their sight; here they acknowledge even their righteousness to be so in God's sight if he should deal with them in strict justice. Our best duties are so defective, and so far short of the rule, that they are as rags, and so full of sin and corruption cleaving to them that they are as filthy rags. When we would do good evil is present with us; and the iniquity of our holy things would be our ruin if we were under the law.

2. There was a general coldness of devotion among them, *v. 7*. The measure was filled by the abounding iniquity of the people, and nothing was done to empty it. (1.) Prayer was in a manner neglected: "*There is none that calls on thy name, none that seeks to thee for grace to reform us and take away sin, or for mercy to relieve us and take away the judgments which our sins have brought upon us.*" Therefore people are so bad, because they do not pray; compare *Ps. xiv. 3, 4*, *They have altogether become filthy, for they call not upon the Lord*. It bodes ill to a people when prayer is restrained among them. (2.) It was very negligently performed. If there was here and there one that called on God's name, it was with a great deal of indifference: *There is none that stirs up himself to take hold of God*. Note, [1.] To pray is to take hold of God, by faith to take hold of the promises and the declarations God has made of his good-will to us and to plead them with him,—to take hold of him as of one who is about to depart from us, earnestly begging of him not to leave us, or of one that has departed, soliciting his return,—to take hold of him as he that wrestles takes hold of him he wrestles with; for the seed of Jacob wrestle with him and so prevail. But when we take hold of God it is as the boatman with his hook takes hold on the shore, as if he would pull the shore to him, but really it is to pull himself to the shore; so we pray, not to bring God to our mind, but to bring ourselves to his. [2.] Those that would take hold of God in prayer so as to prevail with him must stir up themselves to do it; all that is within us must be employed in the duty (and all little enough), our thoughts fixed and our affections flaming. In order hereunto all that is within us must be engaged and summoned into the service; we must stir up the gift that is in us by an actual consideration of the importance of the work that is before us and a close application of mind to it; but how can we expect that God should come to us in ways of mercy when there are none that do this, when those that profess to be intercessors are mere triflers?

II. They acknowledge their afflictions to be the fruit and product of their own sins and God's wrath. 1. They brought their

troubles upon themselves by their own folly: "*We are all as an unclean thing, and therefore we do all fade away as a leaf* (*v. 6*), we not only wither and lose our beauty, but we fall and drop off" (so the word signifies) "as leaves in autumn; our profession of religion withers, and we grow dry and sapless; our prosperity withers and comes to nothing; we fall to the ground, as despicable and contemptible; and then our iniquities like the wind have taken us away and hurried us into captivity, as the winds in autumn blow off, and then blow away, the faded withered leaves." *Ps. i. 3, 4*. Sinners are blasted, and then carried away, by the malignant and violent wind of their own iniquity; it withers them and then ruins them. 2. God brought their troubles upon them by his wrath (*v. 7*): *Thou hast hidden thy face from us*; hast been displeased with us and refused to afford us any succour. When they made themselves as an unclean thing no wonder that God turned his face away from them, as loathing them. Yet this was not all: *Thou hast consumed us because of our iniquities*. This is the same complaint with that (*Ps. xc. 7, 8*), *We are consumed by thy anger*; thou hast melted us, so the word is. God had put them in the furnace, not to consume them as dross, but to melt them as gold, that they might be refined and new-cast.

III. They claim relation to God as their God, and humbly plead it with him, and in consideration of it cheerfully refer themselves to him (*v. 8*): "*But now, O Lord! thou art our Father*: though we have conducted ourselves very undutifully and ungratefully towards thee, yet still we have owned thee as our Father; and, though thou hast corrected us, yet thou hast not cast us off. Foolish and careless as we are, poor and despised and trampled upon as we are by our enemies, yet still thou art our Father; to thee therefore we return in our repentance, as the prodigal arose and came to his father; to thee we address ourselves by prayer; from whom should we expect relief and succour but from our Father? It is the wrath of a Father that we are under, who will be reconciled and not keep his anger for ever." God is their Father, 1. By creation; he gave them their being, formed them into a people, shaped them as he pleased: "*We are the clay and thou our potter*, therefore we will not quarrel with thee, however thou art pleased to deal with us, *Jer. xlviii. 6*. Nay, therefore we will hope that thou wilt deal well with us, that thou whomadest us wilt new-make us, new-form us, though we have unmade and deformed ourselves: *We are all as an unclean thing, but we are all the work of thy hands*, therefore do away our uncleanness, that we may be fit for thy use, the use we were made for. We are the *work of thy hands*, therefore forsake us not," *Ps. cxxxviii. 8*. 2. By covenant; this is pleaded



(v. 9): "*Behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people*, all the people thou hast in the world, that make open profession of thy name. We are called *thy people*, our neighbours look upon us as such, and therefore what we suffer reflects upon thee, and the relief that our case requires is expected from thee. *We are thy people*; and *should not a people seek unto their God?*" ch. viii. 19. *We are thine; save us,*" Ps. cxix. 94. Note, When we are under providential rebukes from God it is good to keep fast hold of our covenant-relation to him.

IV. They are importunate with God for the turning away of his anger and the pardoning of their sins (v. 9): "*Be not wroth very sore, O Lord!* though we have deserved that thou shouldst, *neither remember iniquity for ever against us.*" They do not expressly pray for the removal of the judgment they were under; as to that, they refer themselves to God. But, 1. They pray that God would be reconciled to them, and then they can be easy whether the affliction be continued or removed: "*Be not wroth to extremity*, but let thy anger be mitigated by the clemency and compassion of a father." They do not say, *Lord, rebuke us not*, for that may be necessary, but *Not in thy anger, not in thy hot displeasure*. It is but *in a little wrath* that God *hides his face*. 2. They pray that they may not be dealt with according to the desert of their sin: *Neither remember iniquity for ever*. Such is the evil of sin that it deserves to be remembered for ever; and this is that which they deprecate, that consequence of sin, which is for ever. Those make it to appear that they are truly humbled under the hand of God who are more afraid of the terror of God's wrath, and the fatal consequences of their own sin, than of any judgment whatsoever, looking upon these as the sting of death.

V. They lodge in the court of heaven a very melancholy representation, or memorial, of the lamentable condition they were in and the ruins they were groaning under. 1. Their own houses were in ruins, v. 10. The cities of Judah were destroyed by the Chaldeans and the inhabitants of them were carried away, so that there was none to repair them or take any notice of them, which would in a few years make them look like perfect deserts: *Thy holy cities are a wilderness*. The cities of Judah are called *holy cities*, for the people were unto God a kingdom of priests. The cities had synagogues in them, in which God was served; and therefore they lamented the ruins of them, and insisted upon this in pleading with God for them, not so much that they were stately cities, rich or ancient ones, but that they were holy cities, cities in which God's name was known, professed, and called upon. "These cities are a wilderness; the beauty of them is sullied; they are neither inhabited nor visited, as formerly. *They have burnt up*

*all the synagogues of God in the land,*" Ps. lxxiv. 8. Nor was it only the smaller cities that were thus left as a wilderness unrequented, but even "*Zion is a wilderness*; the city of David itself lies in ruins; Jerusalem, that was *beautiful for situation and the joy of the whole earth*, is now deformed, and has become the scorn and scandal of the whole earth; that noble city is a desolation, a heap of rubbish." See what devastations sin brings upon a people; and an external profession of sanctity will be no fence against them; *holy cities*, if they become wicked cities, will be soonest of all turned into a wilderness, Amos iii. 2. 2. God's house was in ruins, v. 11. This they lament most of all, that *the temple was burnt with fire*; but, as soon as it was built, they were told what their sin would bring it to. 2 Chron. vii. 21, *This house, which is high, shall be an astonishment*. Observe how pathetically they bewail the ruins of the temple. (1.) It was *their holy and beautiful house*; it was a most sumptuous building, but the holiness of it was in their eye the greatest beauty of it, and consequently the profanation of it was the saddest part of its desolation and that which grieved them most, that the sacred services which used to be performed there were discontinued. (2.) It was the place *where their fathers praised God* with their sacrifices and songs; what a pity is it that that should lie in ashes which had been for so many ages the glory of their nation! It aggravated their present disuse of the songs of Zion that their fathers had so often praised God with them. They interest God in the cause when they plead that it was the house where *he had been praised*, and put him in mind too of his covenant with their fathers by taking notice of their fathers' praising him. (3.) With it *all their pleasant things were laid waste*, all their desires and delights, all those things which were employed by them in the service of God, which they had a great delight in; not only the furniture of the temple, the altars and table, but especially the sabbaths and new moons, and all their religious feasts, which they used to keep with gladness, their ministers and solemn assemblies, these were all a desolation. Note, God's people reckon their sacred things their most delectable things; rob them of holy ordinances and the means of grace, and you *lay waste all their pleasant things*. What have they more? Observe here how God and his people have their interest twisted and interchanged; when they speak of the cities for their own habitation they call them *thy holy cities*, for to God they were dedicated; when they speak of the temple wherein God dwelt they call it *our beautiful house* and its furniture *our pleasant things*, for they had heartily espoused it and all the interests of it. If thus we interest God in all our concerns by devoting them to his service, and interest our-

selves in all his concerns by laying them near our hearts, we may with satisfaction leave both with him, for he will perfect both.

VI. They conclude with an affectionate expostulation, humbly arguing with God concerning their present desolations (v. 12): "*Will thou refrain thyself for these things? Or, Canst thou contain thyself at these things? Canst thou see thy temple ruined and not resent it, not revenge it? Has the jealous God forgotten to be jealous? Ps. lxxiv. 22, Arise, O God! plead thy own cause. Lord, thou art insulted, thou art blasphemed; and wilt thou hold thy peace and take no notice of it? Shall the highest affronts that can be done to Heaven pass unrebuked?*" When we are abused we hold our peace, because vengeance does not belong to us, and because we have a God to refer our cause to. When God is injured in his honour it may justly be expected that he should speak in the vindication of it; his people prescribe not to him what he shall say, but their prayer is (as here) Ps. lxxxiii. 1, *Keep not thou silence, O God!* and Ps. cix. 1, *"Hold not thy peace, O God of my praise! Speak for the conviction of thy enemies, speak for the comfort and relief of thy people; for wilt thou afflict us very grievously, or afflict us for ever?"* It is a sore affliction to good people to see God's sanctuary laid waste and nothing done towards the raising of it out of its ruins. But God has said that he *will not contend for ever*, and therefore his people may depend upon it that their afflictions shall be neither to extremity nor to eternity, but *light and for a moment*.

#### CHAP. LXV.

We are now drawing towards the conclusion of this evangelical prophecy, the last two chapters of which direct us to look as far forward as the new heavens and the new earth, the new world which the gospel dispensation should bring in, and the separation that should by it be made between the precious and the vile. "For judgment" (says Christ) "have I come into this world." And why should it seem absurd that the prophet here should speak of that to which all the prophets bore witness? 1 Pet. i. 10, 11. The rejection of the Jews, and the calling in of the Gentiles, are often mentioned in the New Testament as that which was foreseen and foretold by the prophets, Acts x. 43; xlii. 40; Rom. xvi. 25. In this chapter we have, I. The anticipating of the Gentiles with the gospel call, ver. 1. II. The rejection of the Jews for their obstinacy and unbelief, ver. 2—7. III. The saving of a remnant of them by bringing them into the gospel church, ver. 8—10. IV. The judgments of God that should pursue the rejected Jews, ver. 11—16. V. The blessings reserved for the Christian church, which should be its joy and glory, ver. 17—25. But these things are here prophesied of under the type and figure of the difference God would make between some and others of the Jews after their return out of captivity, between those that feared God and those that did not, with reproofs of the sins then found among them and promises of the blessings then in reserve for them.

**I** AM sought of *them that asked not for me*; I am found of *them that sought me not*: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation *that was not called by my name*. 2 I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way *that was not good*, after their own thoughts; 3 A people that provoketh me to anger continually to my

face; that sacrificeth in gardens, and burneth incense upon altars of brick; 4 Which remain among the graves, and lodge in the monuments, which eat swine's flesh, and broth of abominable *things is in* their vessels; 5 Which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou. These *are* a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day. 6 Behold, *it is* written before me: I will not keep silence, but will recompense, even recompense into their bosom, 7 Your iniquities, and the iniquities of your fathers together, saith the LORD, which have burned incense upon the mountains, and blasphemed me upon the hills: therefore will I measure their former work into their bosom.

The apostle Paul (an expositor we may depend upon) has given us the true sense of these verses, and told us what was the event they pointed at and were fulfilled in, namely, the calling in of the Gentiles and the rejection of the Jews, by the preaching of the gospel, Rom. x. 20, 21. And he observes that herein *Isaiah is very bold*, not only in foretelling a thing so improbable ever to be brought about, but in foretelling it to the Jews, who would take it as a gross affront to their nation, and therein Moses's words would be made good (Deut. xxxii. 21), *I will provoke you to jealousy by those that are no people*.

I. It is here foretold that the Gentiles, who had been afar off, should be made nigh, v. 1. Paul reads it thus: *I was found of those that sought me not; I was made manifest to those that asked not for me*. Observe what a wonderful and blessed change was made with them and how they were surprised into it. 1. Those who had long been without God in the world shall now be set a seeking him; those who had not said, *Where is God my maker?* shall now begin to enquire after him. Neither they nor their fathers had called upon his name, but either lived without prayer or prayed to stocks and stones, the work of men's hands. But now they shall be *baptized and call on the name of the Lord*, Acts ii. 21. With what pleasure does the great God here speak of his being sought unto, and how does he glory in it, especially by those who in time past had not asked for him! For there is joy in heaven over great sinners who repent. 2. God shall anticipate their prayers with his blessings: *I am found of those that sought me not*. This happy acquaintance and correspondence between God and the Gentile world began on his side; they came to know God because they were *known of him* (Gal. iv. 9), to seek



God and find him because they were first sought and found of him. Though in after-communion God is found of those that seek him (Prov. viii. 17), yet in the first conversion he is found of those that seek him not; for *therefore we love him because he first loved us*. The design of the bounty of common providence to them was *that they might seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him and find him*, Acts xvii. 27. But they sought him not; still he was to them an *unknown God*, and yet God was found of them. 3. God gave the advantages of a divine revelation to those who had never made a profession of religion: *I said, Behold me, behold me* (gave them a sight of me and invited them to take the comfort and benefit of it) to those who *were not called by my name*, as the Jews for many ages had been. When the apostles went about from place to place, preaching the gospel, this was the substance of what they preached: *"Behold God, behold him, turn towards him, fix the eyes of your minds upon him, acquaint yourselves with him, admire him, adore him; look off from your idols that you have made, and look upon the living God who made you."* Christ in them said, *Behold me, behold me* with an eye of faith; *look unto me, and be you saved*. And this was said to those that had long been *lo-ammi*, and *lo-ruhamah* (Hos. i. 8, 9), *not a people*, and *that had not obtained mercy*, Rom. ix. 25, 26.

II. It is here foretold that the Jews, who had long been a people near to God, should be cast off and set at a distance, v. 2. The apostle applies this to the Jews in his time, as a seed of evil-doers. Rom. x. 21, *But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people*. Here observe,

1. How the Jews were courted to the divine grace. God himself, by his prophets, by his Son, by his apostles, *stretched forth his hands to them*, as Wisdom did, Prov. i. 24. *God spread out his hands to them*, as one reasoning and expostulating with them, not only beckoned to them with the finger, but *spread out his hands*, as being ready to embrace and entertain them, reaching forth the tokens of his favour to them, and importuning them to accept them. When Christ was crucified his hands were *spread out and stretched forth*, as if he were preparing to receive returning sinners into his bosom; and this *all the day*, all the gospel-day. He waited to be gracious, and was not weary of waiting; even those that came in at the eleventh hour of the day were not rejected.

2. How they contemned the invitation; it was given to a rebellious and gainsaying people; they were invited to the wedding-supper, and would not come, but *rejected the counsel of God against themselves*. Now here we have,

(1.) The bad character of this people. The world shall see that it was not for no-

thing that they were rejected of God; no, it was for their whoredoms that they were put away.

[1.] Their character in general was such as one would not expect of those who had been so much the favourites of Heaven. *First*, They were very wilful. Right or wrong they would do as they had a mind. *"They generally walk on in a way that is not good, not the right way, not a safe way, for they walk after their own thought, their own devices and desires."* If our guide be our own thoughts, our way is not likely to be good; for *every imagination of the thought of our hearts is only evil*. God had told them his thoughts, what his mind and will were, but they would walk *after their own thoughts*, would do what they thought best. *Secondly*, They were very provoking. This was God's complaint of them all along—they grieved him, they *taxed his Holy Spirit*, as if they would contrive how to make him their enemy. *They provoke me to anger continually to my face*. They cared not what affront they gave to God, though it were in his sight and presence, in a downright contempt of his authority and defiance of his justice; and this *continually*; it had been their way and manner ever since they were a people, witness the *day of temptation in the wilderness*.

[2.] The prophet speaks more particularly of *their iniquities and the iniquities of their fathers*, as the ground of God's casting them off, v. 7. Now he gives instances of both.

*First*, The most provoking iniquity of their fathers was idolatry; this, the prophet tells them, was provoking God to his face; and it is an iniquity which, as appears by the second commandment, God often *visits upon the children*. This was the sin that brought them into captivity, and, though the captivity pretty well cured them of it, yet, when the final ruin of that nation came, that was again brought into the account against them; for in the day when God visits he will visit that, Exod. xxxii. 34. Perhaps there were many, long after the captivity, who, though they did not worship other gods, were yet guilty of the disorders here mentioned; for they married strange wives. 1. They forsook God's temple, and *sacrificed in gardens or groves*, that they might have the satisfaction of doing it in their own way, for they liked not God's institutions. 2. They forsook God's altar, and *burnt incense upon bricks, altars of their own contriving* (they burnt incense according to their own inventions, which were of no more value, in comparison with God's institution, than an altar of bricks in comparison with the golden altar which God appointed them to burn incense on), or *upon tiles* (so some read it), such as they covered their flat-roofed houses with, and on them sometimes they burnt incense to their idols, as appears, 2 Kings xxiii. 12, where we read of altars *on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz*, and Jer. xix. 13, of their

burning incense to the host of heaven upon the roofs of their houses. 3. "They used necromancy, or consulting with the dead, and, in order to that, they remained among the graves, and lodged in the monuments," to seek for the living to the dead (*ch. viii. 19*), as the witch of Endor. Or they used to consult the evil spirits that haunted the sepulchres. 4. They violated the laws of God about their meat, and broke through the distinction between clean and unclean before it was taken away by the gospel. They ate swine's flesh. Some indeed chose rather to die than to eat swine's flesh, as Eleazar and the seven brethren in the story of the Maccabees; but it is probable that many ate of it, especially when it came to be a condition of life. In our Saviour's time we read of a vast herd of swine among them, which gives us cause to suspect that there were many then who made so little conscience of the law as to eat swine's flesh, for which they were justly punished in the destruction of the swine. And the broth, or pieces, of other forbidden meats, called here *abominable things*, was in their vessels, and was made use of for food. The forbidden meat is called an *abomination*, and those that meddle with it are said to *make themselves abominable*, Lev. xi. 42, 43. Those that durst not eat the meat yet made bold with the broth, because they would come as near as might be to that which was forbidden, to show how they coveted the forbidden fruit. Perhaps this is here put figuratively for all forbidden pleasures and profits which are obtained by sin, that *abominable thing which the Lord hates*; they loved to be dallying with it, to be tasting of its broth. But those who thus take a pride in venturing upon the borders of sin, and the brink of it, are in danger of falling into the depths of it. But,

Secondly, The most provoking iniquity of the Jews in our Saviour's time was their pride and hypocrisy, that sin of the scribes and Pharisees against which Christ denounced so many woes, *v. 5*. They say, "*Stand by thyself, keep off*" (*get thee to thine*, so the original is); "keep to thy own companions, but come not near to me, lest thou pollute me; touch me not; I will not allow thee any familiarity with me, for I am holier than thou, and therefore thou art not good enough to converse with me; I am not as other men are, nor even as this publican." This they were ready to say to every one they met with, so that, in saying, *I am holier than thou*, they thought themselves holier than any, not only very good, as good as they should be, as good as they needed to be, but better than any of their neighbours. These are a smoke in my nose (says God), such a smoke as comes not from a quick fire, which soon becomes glowing and pleasant, but from a fire of wet wood, which burns all the day, and is nothing but smoke. Note, Nothing in men is more odious and offensive

to God than a proud conceit of themselves and contempt of others; for commonly those are most unholy of all that think themselves holier than any.

(2.) The controversy God had with them for this. The proof against them is plain. Behold, it is written before me, *v. 6*. It is written, to be remembered against them in time to come; for they may not perhaps be immediately reckoned with. The sins of sinners, and particularly the vainglorious boasts and scorns of hypocrites, are laid up in store with God, Deut. xxxii. 34. And what is written shall be read and proceeded upon: "*I will not keep silence* always, though I may keep silence long." They shall not think him altogether such a one as themselves, as sometimes they have done; but he will recompense, even recompense into their bosom. Those basely abuse religion, that honourable and sacred thing, who make their profession of it the matter of their pride, and the jealous God will reckon with them for it; the profession they boast of shall but serve to aggravate their condemnation. [1.] The iniquity of their fathers shall come against them; not but that their own sin deserved whatever judgments God brought upon them, and much heavier; and this they owned, Ezra ix. 13. But God would not have wrought so great a desolation upon them if he had not therein had an eye to the sins of their fathers. Therefore in the last destruction of Jerusalem God is said to bring upon them the blood of the Old-Testament martyrs, even that of Abel, Matt. xxiii. 35. God will reckon with them, not only for their fathers' idols, but for their high places, their burning incense upon the mountains and the hills, though perhaps it was to the true God only. This was blaspheming or reproaching God; it was a reflection upon the choice he had made of the place where he would record his name, and the promise he had made that there he would meet them and bless them. [2.] Their own with that shall bring ruin upon them: *Your iniquities and the iniquities of your fathers* together, the one aggravating the other, constitute the former work, which, though it may seem to be overlooked and forgotten, shall be measured into their bosom. God will render into the bosom, not only of his open enemies (Ps. lxxix. 12), but of his false and treacherous friends, the reproach wherewith they have reproached him.

8 Thus saith the LORD, As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it: so will I do for my servants' sakes, that I may not destroy them all. 9 And I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of my mountains: and mine elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there. 10 And



Sharon shall be a fold of flocks, and the valley of Achor a place for the herds to lie down in, for my people that have sought me.

This is expounded by St. Paul, Rom. xi. 1—5, where, when, upon occasion of the rejection of the Jews, it is asked, *Hath God then cast away his people?* he answers, No; for *at this time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.* This prophecy has reference to that distinguished remnant. When that hypocritical nation is to be destroyed God will separate and secure to himself some from among them; some of the Jews shall be brought to embrace the Christian faith, shall be added to the church, and so be saved. And our Saviour has told us that *for the sake of these elect* the days of the destruction of the Jews should be shortened, and a stop put to the desolation, which otherwise would have proceeded to such a degree that *no flesh should be saved*, Matt. xxiv. 22. Now,

I. This is illustrated here by a comparison, v. 8. When a vine is so blasted and withered that there seems to be no sap nor life in it, and therefore the dresser of the vineyard is inclined to pluck it up or cut it down, yet, if ever so little of the juice of the grape, fit to make new wine, be found, though but in one cluster, a stander-by interposes, and says, *Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it*; there is life in the root, and hope that yet it may become good for something. Good men are blessings to the places where they live; and sometimes God spares whole cities and nations for the sake of a few such in them. How ambitious should we be of this honour, not only to be distinguished from others, but serviceable to others!

II. Here is a description of those that shall make up this saved saving remnant. 1. They are such as serve God. It is *for my servants' sake* (v. 8), and they are *my servants* that shall dwell there, v. 9. God's faithful servants, however they are looked upon, are the best friends their country has; and those who serve him do therein *serve their generation*. 2. They are such as seek God, make it the end of their lives to glorify God and the business of their lives to call upon him. It is *for my people that have sought me*. Those that seek God shall find him, and shall find him their bountiful rewarder.

III. Here is an account of the mercy God has in store for them. The remnant that shall return out of captivity shall have a happy settlement again in their own land, and that by an hereditary right, as *a seed out of Jacob*, in whom the family is kept up and the entail preserved, and from whom, as from the seed sown, shall spring a numerous increase; and these typify the remnant of Jacob that shall be incorporated into the gospel church by faith. 1 They shall have

a good portion for themselves. They shall inherit *my mountains*, the holy mountains on which Jerusalem and the temple were built, or the mountains of Canaan, *the land of promise*, typifying the covenant of grace, which all God's servants, his elect, both inhabit and inherit; they make it their refuge, their rest and residence, so they dwell in it, are at home in it; and they have taken it to be their heritage for ever, and it shall be to them an inheritance incorruptible. God's chosen, the spiritual seed of praying Jacob, shall be the inheritors of his mountains of bliss and joy, and shall be carried safely to them through the vale of tears. 2. They shall have a green pasture for their flocks, v. 10. *Sharon and the valley of Achor* shall again be as well replenished as ever they were with cattle. Sharon lay westward, near Joppa; Achor lay eastward, near Jordan. It is therefore intimated that they shall recover the possession of the whole land, that they shall have wherewith to stock it all, and that they shall peaceably enjoy it and there shall be none to disturb them nor make them afraid. Gospel-ordinances are the fields and valleys where the sheep of Christ shall *go in and out and find pasture* (John x. 9), and where they are *made to lie down* (Ps. xxiii. 2), as Israel's herds in *the valley of Achor*, Hos. ii. 15.

11 But ye are they that forsake the Lord, that forget my holy mountain, that prepare a table for that troop, and that furnish the drink-offering unto that number. 12 Therefore will I number you to the sword, and ye shall all bow down to the slaughter: because when I called, ye did not answer; when I spake, ye did not hear; but did evil before mine eyes, and did choose *that* wherein I delighted not. 13 Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry: behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty: behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed: 14 Behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit. 15 And ye shall leave your name for a curse unto my chosen: for the Lord God shall slay thee, and call his servants by another name: 16 That he who bleseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth; and he that sweareth in the earth shall swear by the God of truth; because the former

troubles are forgotten, and because they are hid from mine eyes.

Here the different states of the godly and wicked, of the Jews that believed and of those that still persisted in unbelief, are set the one over-against the other, as life and death, good and evil, the blessing and the curse.

I. Here is the fearful doom of those that persisted in their idolatry after the deliverance out of Babylon, and in infidelity after the preaching of the gospel of Christ. Observe,

1. What the doom is that is here threatened: "*I will number you to the sword as sheep for the slaughter, and there shall be no escaping, no standing out; you shall all bow down to it,*" v. 12. God's judgments come, (1.) Regularly, and are executed according to the commission. Those fall by the sword that are numbered or counted out to it, and none besides. Though the sword seems to devour promiscuously *one as well as another*, yet it is made to know its number and shall not exceed. (2.) Irresistibly. The strongest and most stout-hearted sinners shall be forced to bow before them; for none ever hardened their hearts against God and prospered.

2. What the sins are that number them to the sword. (1.) Idolatry was the ancient sin (v. 11): "*You are those who, instead of seeking me and serving me as my people, forsake the Lord, disown him, and cast him off to embrace other gods, who forget my holy mountain* (the privileges it confers and the obligations it lays you under) *to burn incense upon the mountains of your idols* (v. 7), *and have deserted the one only living and true God.*" They *prepared a table for that troop of deities* which the heathen worship and *poured out drink-offerings to that numberless number of them*; for those that thought one God too little never thought scores and hundreds sufficient, but were still adding to the number of them, till they had as many gods as cities and their altars were as thick as *heaps in the furrows of the field*, Hos. xii. 11. Some take *Gad* and *Meni*, which we translate *a troop* and *a number*, to be the proper names of two of their idols, answering to Jupiter and Mercury. Whatever they were, their worshippers spared no cost to do them honour; they prepared a table for them, and filled out mixed wine for drink-offerings to them; they would pinch their families rather than stint their devotions, which should shame the worshippers of the true God out of their niggardliness. (2.) Infidelity was the sin of the later Jews (v. 12): "*When I called, you did not answer*, which refers to the same that v. 2 did (*I have stretched out my hands to a rebellious people*), and that is applied to those who rejected the gospel. Our Lord Jesus himself called (he *stood and cried*, John vii. 37), but they did not hear, they would not answer; they were not convinced

by his reasonings nor moved by his exhortations; both the fair warnings he gave them of death and ruin and the fair offers he made them of life and happiness were slighted and made no impression upon them. Yet this was not all: *You did evil before my eyes*, not by surprise, or through inadvertency, but with deliberation: *You did choose that wherein I delighted not*; he means that which he utterly detested and abhorred. It is not strange that those who will not be persuaded to choose that which is good persist in their choice and pursuit of that which is evil. See the malignity of sin; it is evil in God's eyes, highly offensive to him, and yet it is committed before his eyes, in his sight and presence, and in contempt of him; it is likewise a contradiction to the will of God; it is doing that, of choice, which we know will displease him.

II. The aggravation of this doom, from the consideration of the happy state of those that were brought to repentance and faith.

1. The blessedness of those that serve God, and the woeful condition of those that rebel against him, are here set the *one over-against the other*, that they may serve as a foil to each other, v. 13—16. (1.) God's servants may well think themselves happy, and for ever indebted to that free grace which made them so, when they see how miserable some of their neighbours are for want of that grace, who are hardened, and likely to perish for ever in unbelief, and what a narrow escape they had of being among them. See ch. lxvi. 24. (2.) It will add to the grief of those that perish to see the happiness of God's servants (whom they had hated, and vilified, and looked upon with the utmost disdain), and especially to think that they might have shared in their bliss if it had not been their own fault. It made the torment of the rich man in hell the more grievous that he *saw Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom*, Luke xvi. 23. See Luke xiii. 28. Sometimes the providence of God makes such a difference as this between good and bad in this world, and the prosperity of the righteous becomes a grievous eye-sore and vexation of heart to the wicked (Ps. cxii. 10), and it will certainly be so in the great day. *We fools counted his life madness and his end without honour; but now how is he numbered with the saints and his lot is among the chosen.* Now,

2. The difference of their states lies in two things:—

(1.) In point of comfort and satisfaction. [1.] God's servants shall eat and drink; they shall have the bread of life to feed, to feast upon, continually, shall be abundantly replenished with the goodness of his house, and shall want nothing that is good for them. Heaven's happiness will be to them an everlasting feast; they shall be filled with that which now they hunger and thirst after. But those who set their hearts upon



the world, and place their happiness in that, shall be hungry and thirsty, always empty, always craving; for it is not bread; it suffeith, but it satisfies not. In communion with God, and dependence upon him, there is full satisfaction; but in sinful pursuits there is nothing but disappointment. [2.] God's servants *shall rejoice* and sing for joy of heart. They have constant cause for joy, and there is nothing that may be an occasion of grief to them but they have an allay sufficient for it; and, as far as faith is in act and exercise, they have a heart to rejoice, and their joy is their strength. They shall rejoice in their hope, because it shall not make them ashamed. Heaven will be a world of everlasting joy to all that are now sowing in tears. But, on the other hand, those that forsake the Lord shut themselves out from all true joy, for *they shall be ashamed* of their vain confidence in themselves, and their own righteousness, and the hopes they had built thereon. When the expectations of bliss wherewith they had flattered themselves are frustrated, O what confusion will fill their faces! Then shall they *cry for sorrow of heart, and howl for vexation of spirit*, perhaps in this world, when their laughter shall be turned into mourning and their joy into heaviness, and certainly in that world where the torment will be endless, easeless, and remediless—nothing but weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, to eternity. Let these two be compared, *Now he is comforted and thou art tormented*, and which of the two will we choose to take our lot with?

(2.) In point of honour and reputation, v. 15, 16. *The memory of the just is*, and shall be, *blessed, but the name of the wicked shall rot*. [1.] The name of the idolaters and unbelievers shall be left for a curse, shall be loaded with ignominy and made for ever infamous. It shall be used in giving bad characters—*Thou art as cruel as a Jew*; and in imprecation—*God make thee as miserable as a Jew*. It shall be for a curse to God's chosen, that is, for a warning to them; they shall be afraid of falling under the curse upon the Jewish nation, of perishing after the same example of unbelief. The curse of those whom God rejects should make his chosen stand in awe. *The Lord God shall slay thee*; he shall quite extirpate the Jews and cut them off from being a people; they shall no longer live as a nation, nor ever be incorporated again. [2.] The name of God's chosen shall become a blessing: *He shall call his servants by another name*. The children of the covenant shall no longer be called *Jews*, but *Christians*; and to them, under that name, all the promises and privileges of the new covenant shall be secured. This other name shall be an honourable name; it shall not be confined to one nation, but with it men shall *bless themselves in the earth*, all the world over. God shall have servants out of all nations who shall all be

dignified with this new name. They shall bless themselves in the God of truth. *First*, They shall give honour to God both in their prayers and in their solemn oaths, in their addresses for his favour as their felicity and their appeals to his justice as their Judge. This is a part of the homage we owe to God; we must bless ourselves in him, that is, we must reckon that we have enough to make us happy, that we need no more, and can desire no more, if we have him for our God. It is of great consequence what we bless ourselves in, what we most please ourselves with and value ourselves by our interest in. Worldly people bless themselves in the abundance they have of this world's goods (Ps. xlix. 18; Luke xii. 19); but God's servants bless themselves in him, as a God all-sufficient for them. He is their crown of glory and diadem of beauty, their strength and portion. By him also *they shall swear*, and not by any creature or any false god. To his judgment they shall refer their cause, from whom every man's judgment doth proceed. *Secondly*, They shall give honour to him as the God of truth, the God of the Amen (so the word is); some understand it of Christ who is himself the Amen, the faithful witness (Rev. iii. 14), and in whom all the promises are yea and amen, 2 Cor. i. 20. In him we must bless ourselves, and by him we must swear unto the Lord and covenant with him. He that is *blessed in the earth* (so some read it) *shall be blessed in the true God*, for Christ is the true God and eternal life, 1 John v. 20. And it was promised of old that *in him all the families of the earth should be blessed*, Gen. xii. 3. Some read it, *He shall bless himself in the God of the faithful people*, in God as the God of all believers, desiring no more than to share in the blessings wherewith they are blessed, to be dealt with as he deals with them. *Thirdly*, They shall give him honour as the author of this blessed change which they have the experience of; they shall think themselves happy in having him for their God who has made them to forget their former troubles, the remembrance of them being swallowed up in their present comforts: *Because they are hidden from God's eyes*, that is, they are quite taken away; for, if there were any remainder of their troubles, God would be sure to have his eye upon it, in compassion to them and concern for them. They shall no longer feel them; for God will no longer see them. He is pleased to speak as if he would make himself easy by making them easy; and therefore they shall with a great deal of satisfaction bless themselves in him.

17 For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. 18 But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create:

for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. 19 And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. 20 There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die a hundred years old; but the sinner *being* a hundred years old shall be accursed. 21 And they shall build houses, and inhabit *them*; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. 22 They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree *are* the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. 23 They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they *are* the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them. 24 And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. 25 The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust *shall be* the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD.

If these promises were in part fulfilled when the Jews, after their return out of captivity, were settled in peace in their own land and brought as it were into a new world, yet they were to have their full accomplishment in the gospel church, militant first and at length triumphant. *The Jerusalem that is from above is free and is the mother of us all.* In the graces and comforts which believers have in and from Christ we are to look for this new heaven and new earth. It is in the gospel that *old things have passed away and all things have become new*, and by it that those who are in Christ are *new creatures*, 2 Cor. v. 17. It was a mighty and happy change that was described v. 16, that *the former troubles were forgotten*; but here it rises much higher: even the *former world* shall be *forgotten and shall no more come into mind*. Those that were converted to the Christian faith were so transported with the comforts of it that all the comforts they were before acquainted with became as nothing to them; not only their foregoing griefs, but their foregoing joys, were lost and swallowed up in this. The glorified saints will there-

fore have forgotten this world, because they will be entirely taken up with the other: *For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth.* See how inexhaustible the divine power is; the same God that created one heaven and earth can create another. See how entire the happiness of the saints is; it shall be all of a piece; with the new heavens God will create them (if they have occasion for it to make them happy) a new earth too. *The world is yours* if you be Christ's, 1 Cor. iii. 22. When God is reconciled to us, which gives us a new heaven, the creatures too are reconciled to us, which gives us a new earth. The future glory of the saints will be so entirely different from what they ever knew before that it may well be called *new heavens and a new earth*, 2 Pet. iii. 13. *Behold, I make all things new*, Rev. xxi. 5.

I. There shall be new joys. For, 1. All the church's friends, and all that belong to her, shall rejoice (v. 18): *You shall be glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create.* The new things which God creates in and by his gospel are and shall be matter of everlasting joy to all believers. *My servants shall rejoice* (v. 13), at last they shall, though now they mourn. *Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.* 2 The church shall be the matter of their joy, so pleasant, so prosperous, shall her condition be: *I create Jerusalem a rejoicing and her people a joy.* The church shall not only rejoice but be rejoiced in. Those that have sorrowed with the church shall rejoice with her. 3. The prosperity of the church shall be a rejoicing to God himself, who has pleasure in the prosperity of his servants (v. 19): *I will rejoice in Jerusalem's joy, and will joy in my people*; for in all their affliction he was afflicted. God will not only rejoice in the church's well-doing, but will himself rejoice to do her good and rest in his love to her, Zeph. iii. 17. What God rejoices in it becomes us to rejoice in. 4. There shall be no alloy of this joy, nor any alteration of this happy condition of the church: *The voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her.* If this relate to any state of the church in this life, it means no more than that the former occasions of grief shall not return, but God's people shall long enjoy an uninterrupted tranquillity. But in heaven it shall have a full accomplishment, in respect both of the perfection and the perpetuity of the promised joy; there *all tears shall be wiped away*.

II. There shall be new life, v. 20. Untimely deaths by the sword or sickness shall be no more known as they have been, and by this means there shall be *no more the voice of crying*, v. 19. When there shall be *no more death* there shall be *no more sorrow*, Rev. xxi. 4. As death has reigned by sin, so life shall reign by righteousness, Rom v. 14, 21. 1. Believers through Christ shall be satisfied with life, though it be ever so short on earth. If an infant end its days



quickly, yet it shall not be reckoned to die untimely; for the shorter its life is the longer will its rest be. Though death reign over those that have not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, yet they, dying in the arms of Christ, the second Adam, and belonging to his kingdom, are not to be called *infants of days*, but even the child shall be reckoned to die a hundred years old, for he shall rise again at full age, shall rise to eternal life. Some understand it of children who in their childhood are so eminent for wisdom and grace, and by death nipped in the blossom, that they may be said to die a hundred years old. And, as for old men, it is promised that *they shall fill their days with the fruits of righteousness*, which they shall still bring forth in old age, to show that the Lord is upright, and then it is a good old age. An old man who is wise, and good, and useful, may truly be said to have filled his days. Old men who have their hearts upon the world have never filled their days, never have enough of this world, but would still continue longer in it. But that man dies old, and *satur dierum—full of days*, who, with Simeon, having seen God's salvation, desires now to depart in peace. 2. Unbelievers shall be unsatisfied and unhappy in life, though it be ever so long. The sinner, though he live to be a hundred years old, shall be accursed. His living so long shall be no token to him of the divine favour and blessing, nor shall it be any shelter to him from the divine wrath and curse. The sentence he lies under will certainly be executed, and his long life is but a long reprieve; nay, it is itself a curse to him, for the longer he lives the more wrath he treasures up against the day of wrath and the more sins he will have to answer for. So that the matter is not great whether our lives on earth be long or short, but whether we live the lives of saints or the lives of sinners.

III. There shall be a new enjoyment of the comforts of life. Whereas before it was very uncertain and precarious, their enemies inhabited the houses which they built and ate the fruit of the trees which they planted, now it shall be otherwise; they shall build houses and inhabit them, shall plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them, v. 21, 22. This intimates that the labour of their hands shall be blessed and be made to prosper; they shall gain what they aimed at, and what they have gained shall be preserved and secured to them; they shall enjoy it comfortably, and nothing shall embitter it to them, and they shall live to enjoy it long. Strangers shall not break in upon them, to expel them, and plant themselves in their room, as sometimes they have done: *My elect shall wear out, or long enjoy, the work of their hands*; it is honestly got, and it will wear well; it is the work of their hands, which they themselves have laboured for, and it is most comfortable to enjoy that, and not to eat the bread

of idleness, or bread of deceit. If we have a heart to enjoy it, that is the gift of God's grace (Eccl. iii. 13); and, if we live to enjoy it long, it is the gift of God's providence, for that is here promised: *As the days of a tree are the days of my people*; as the days of an oak (ch. vi. 13), whose substance is in it, though it cast its leaves; though it be stripped every winter, it recovers itself again, and lasts many ages; as the days of the tree of life; so the LXX. Christ is to them the tree of life, and in him believers enjoy all those spiritual comforts which are typified by the abundance of temporal blessings here promised; and it shall not be in the power of their enemies to deprive them of these blessings or disturb them in the enjoyment of them.

IV. There shall be a new generation rising up in their stead to inherit and enjoy these blessings (v. 23): *They shall not labour in vain*, for they shall not only enjoy the work of their hands themselves, but they shall leave it with satisfaction to those that shall come after them, and not with such a melancholy prospect as Solomon did, Eccl. ii. 18, 19. They shall not beget and bring forth children for trouble; for they are themselves the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and there is a blessing entailed upon them by descent from their ancestors which their offspring with them shall partake of, and shall be, as well as they, the seed of the blessed of the Lord. They shall not bring forth for trouble; for, 1. God will make their children that rise up comforts to them; they shall have the joy of seeing them walk in the truth. 2. He will make the times that come after comfortable to their children. As they shall be good, so it shall be well with them; they shall not be brought forth to days of trouble; nor shall it ever be said, *Blessed is the womb that bore not*. In the gospel church Christ's name shall be borne up by a succession. *A seed shall serve him* (Ps. xxii. 30), *the seed of the blessed of the Lord*.

V. There shall be a good correspondence between them and their God (v. 24): *Even before they call, I will answer*. God will anticipate their prayers with the blessings of his goodness. David did but say, *I will confess*, and God forgave, Ps. xxxii. 5. The father of the prodigal met him in his return. *While they are yet speaking*, before they have finished their prayer, I will give them the thing they pray for, or the assurances and earnest of it. These are high expressions of God's readiness to hear prayer; and this appears much more in the grace of the gospel than it did under the law; we owe the comfort of it to the mediation of Christ as our advocate with the Father and are obliged in gratitude to give a ready ear to God's calls.

VI. There shall be a good correspondence between them and their neighbours (v. 25):



*The wolf and the lamb shall feed together*, as they did in Noah's ark. God's people, though they are as sheep in the midst of wolves, shall be safe and unhurt; for God will not so much break the power and tie the hands of their enemies as formerly, but he will turn their hearts, will alter their dispositions by his grace. When Paul, who had been a persecutor of the disciples (and who, being of the tribe of Benjamin, ravened as a wolf, Gen. xlix. 27) joined himself to them and became one of them, then *the wolf and the lamb fed together*. So also when the enmity between Jews and Gentiles was slain, all hostilities ceased, and they fed together as one sheepfold under Christ the great Shepherd, John x. 16. The enemies of the church ceased to do the mischief they had done, and its members ceased to be so quarrelsome with and injurious to one another as they had been, so that there was none either from without or from within to hurt or destroy, none to disturb it, much less to ruin it, *in all the holy mountain*; as was promised, ch. xi. 9. For, 1. Men shall be changed: *The lion shall no more be a beast of prey*, as perhaps he never would have been if sin had not entered, but *shall eat straw like the bullock*, shall know his owner, and his master's crib, as the ox does. When those that lived by spoil and rapine, and coveted to enrich themselves, right or wrong, are brought by the grace of God to accommodate themselves to their condition, to live by honest labour, and to be content with such things as they have—when those that stole steal no more, but work with their hands the thing that is good—then this is fulfilled, that *the lion shall eat straw like the bullock*. 2. Satan shall be chained, the dragon bound; *for dust shall be the serpent's meat again*. That great enemy, when he has been let loose, has glutted and regaled himself with the precious blood of saints, who by his instigation have been persecuted, and with the precious souls of sinners, who by his instigation have become persecutors and have ruined themselves for ever; but now he shall be confined to dust, according to the sentence, *On thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat*, Gen. iii. 14. All the enemies of God's church, that are subtle and venomous as serpents, shall be conquered and subdued, and be made to lick the dust. Christ shall reign as Zion's King till all the enemies of his kingdom be made his footstool, and theirs too. In the holy mountain above, and there only, shall this promise have its full accomplishment, that there shall be none to hurt nor destroy.

## CHAP. LXVI.

The scope of this chapter is much the same as that of the foregoing chapter and many expressions of it are the same; it therefore looks the same way, to the different state of the good and bad among the Jews at their return out of captivity, but that typifying the rejection of the Jews in the days of the Messiah, the conversion of the Gentiles, and the setting up of the gospel-kingdom in the world. The first verse of this chapter is applied by Stephen to the dismantling of the temple by the planting of the Christian church (Acts vii. 46, 50), which may serve as a key to the whole chapter. We have here, I. The contempt God puts upon cere-

monial services in comparison with moral duties, and an intimation therein of his purpose shortly to put an end to the temple, and sacrifice and reject those that adhered to them, ver. 1—4. II. The salvation God will in due time work for his people out of the hands of their oppressors (ver. 5), speaking terror to the persecutors (ver. 6) and comfort to the persecuted, a speedy and complete deliverance (ver. 7—9), a joyful settlement (ver. 10, 11), the accession of the Gentiles to them, and abundance of satisfaction therein, ver. 12—14. III. The terrible vengeance which God will bring upon the enemies of his church and people, ver. 15—18. IV. The happy establishment of the church upon large and sure foundations, its constant attendance on God and triumph over its enemies, ver. 19—24. And we may well expect that this evangelical prophet, here, in the close of his prophecy, should (as he does) look as far forward as to the latter days, to the last day, to the days of eternity.

THUS saith the LORD, The heaven *is* my throne, and the earth *is* my footstool: where *is* the house that ye build unto me? and where *is* the place of my rest? 2 For all those *things* hath mine hand made, and all those *things* have been, saith the LORD: but to this *man* will I look, *even to him that is* poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word. 3 He that killeth an ox *is as if* he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, *as if* he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, *as if* he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, *as if* he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations. 4 I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose *that* in which I delighted not.

Here, I. The temple is slighted in comparison with a gracious soul, v. 1, 2. The Jews in the prophet's time, and afterwards in Christ's time, gloried much in the temple and promised themselves great things from it; to humble them therefore, and to shake their vain confidence, both the prophets and Christ foretold the ruin of the temple, that God would leave it and then it would soon be desolate. After it was destroyed by the Chaldeans it soon recovered itself and the ceremonial services were revived with it; but by the Romans it was made a perpetual desolation, and the ceremonial law was abolished with it. That the world might be prepared for this, they were often told, as here, of what little account the temple was with God. 1. That he did not need it. Heaven is the throne of his glory and government; there he sits, infinitely exalted in the highest dignity and dominion, above all blessing and praise. The earth is his footstool, on which he stands, overruling all the affairs of it according to his will. If God has so bright a throne, so large a footstool, *where then is the house they can*



build unto God, that can be the residence of his glory, or *where is the place of his rest?* What satisfaction can the Eternal Mind take in a house made with men's hands? What occasion has he, as we have, for a house to repose himself in, who *faints not neither is weary*, who neither slumbers nor sleeps? Or, if he had occasion, he would not tell us (Ps. l. 12), for *all these things hath his hand made*, heaven and all its courts, earth and all its borders, and all the hosts of both. *All these things have been*, have had their beginning, by the power of God, who was happy from eternity before they were, and therefore could not be benefited by them. *All these things are* (so some read it); they still continue, upheld by the same power that made them; so that *our goodness extends not to him*. If he required a house for himself to dwell in, he would have made one himself when he made the world; and, if he had made one, it would have continued to this day, as other creatures do, according to his ordinance; so that he had no need of a temple made with hands. 2. That he would not heed it as he would a humble, penitent, gracious heart. He has a heaven and earth of his own making, and a temple of man's making; but he overlooks them all, that he may look with favour to him that is poor in spirit, humble and serious, self-abasing and self-denying, whose heart is truly contrite for sin, penitent for it, and in pain to get it pardoned, and who *trembles at God's word*, not as Felix did, with a transient qualm that was over when the sermon was done, but with an habitual awe of God's majesty and purity and an habitual dread of his justice and wrath. Such a heart is a living temple for God; he dwells there, and it is the place of his rest; it is like heaven and earth, his throne and his footstool.

II. Sacrifices are slighted when they come from ungracious hands. *The sacrifice of the wicked* is not only unacceptable, but it is *an abomination to the Lord* (Prov. xv. 8); this is largely shown here, v. 3, 4. Observe, 1. How detestable their sacrifices were to God. The carnal Jews, after their return out of captivity, though they relapsed not to idolatry, grew very careless and loose in the service of God; they brought the *torn, and the lame, and the sick for sacrifice* (Mal. i. 8, 13), and this made their services abominable to God; they had no regard to their sacrifices, and therefore how could they think God would have any regard to them? The unbelieving Jews, after the gospel was preached and in it notice given of the offering up of the great sacrifice, which put an end to all the ceremonial services, continued to offer sacrifices, as if the law of Moses had been still in force and could *make the comers thereunto perfect*: this was an abomination. *He that kills an ox for his own table is welcome to do it*; but he that now kills it, that thus kills it, for God's altar, *is as if he slew a man*; it is as

great an offence to God as murder itself; he that does it does in effect set aside Christ's sacrifice, *treads under foot the blood of the covenant*, and makes himself accessory to the guilt of *the body and blood of the Lord*, setting up what Christ died to abolish. *He that sacrifices a lamb*, if it be a corrupt thing, and not the male in his flock, the best he has, if he think to put God off with any thing, he affronts him, instead of pleasing him; it is *as if he cut off a dog's neck*, a creature in the eye of the law so vile that, whereas an ass might be redeemed, the price of a dog was never to be brought into the treasury, Deut. xxiii. 18. *He that offers an oblation*, a meat-offering or drink-offering, is as if he thought to make atonement with *swine's blood*, a creature that must not be eaten nor touched, the *broth of it* was abominable (ch. lrv. 4), much more the blood of it. *He that burns incense to God*, and so puts contempt upon the incense of Christ's intercession, is *as if he blessed an idol*; it was as great an affront to God as if they had paid their devotions to a false god. Hypocrisy and profaneness are as provoking as idolatry. 2. What their wickedness was which made their sacrifices thus detestable. It was *because they had chosen their own ways*, the ways of their own wicked hearts, and not only their hands did but *their souls delighted in their abominations*. They were vicious and immoral in their conversations, chose the way of sin rather than the way of God's commandments, and took pleasure in that which was provoking to God; this made their sacrifices so offensive to God, ch. l. 11—15. Those that pretend to honour God by a profession of religion, and yet live wicked lives, put an affront upon him, as if he were the patron of sin. And that which was an aggravation of their wickedness was that they persisted in it, notwithstanding the frequent calls given them to repent and reform; they turned a deaf ear to all the warnings of divine justice and all the offers of divine grace: *When I called, none did answer*, as before, ch. lrv. 12. And the same follows here that did there: *They did evil before my eyes*. Being deaf to what he said, they cared not what he saw, but chose that in which they knew he delighted not. How could those expect to please him in their devotions who took no care to please him in their conversations, but, on the contrary, designed to provoke him? 3. The doom passed upon them for this. *They chose their own ways*, therefore, says God, *I also will choose their delusions*. *They have made their choice* (as Mr. Gataker paraphrases it), *and now I will make mine*; they have taken what course they pleased with me, and I will take what course I please with them. I will choose their illusions, or mockeries (so some); as they have mocked God and dishonoured him by their wickedness, so God will give them up to their enemies, to be trampled upon and



insulted by them. Or they shall be deceived by those vain confidences with which they have deceived themselves. God will make their sin their punishment; they shall be beaten with their own rod and hurried into ruin by their own delusions. God will *bring their fears upon them*, that is, will bring upon them that which shall be a great terror to them, or that which they themselves have been afraid of and thought to escape by sinful shifts. Unbelieving hearts, and unpurified unpacified consciences, need no more to make them miserable than to have their own fears brought upon them.

5 Hear the word of the LORD, ye that tremble at his word; your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the LORD be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed. 6 A voice of noise from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice of the LORD that rendereth recompence to his enemies. 7 Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child. 8 Who hath heard such a thing? Who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children. 9 Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? saith the LORD: shall I cause to bring forth, and shut *the womb*? saith thy God. 10 Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her: rejoice for joy with her, all ye that mourn for her: 11 That ye may suck, and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations; that ye may milk out, and be delighted with the abundance of her glory. 12 For thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream: then shall ye suck, ye shall be borne upon *her* sides, and be dandled upon *her* knees. 13 As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem. 14 And when ye see *this*, your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like a herb: and the hand of the LORD shall be known toward his ser-

vants, and *his* indignation toward his enemies.

The prophet, having denounced God's judgments against a hypocritical nation, that made a jest of God's word and would not answer him when he called to them, here turns his speech to those that *trembled at his word*, to comfort and encourage them; they shall not be involved in the judgments that are coming upon their unbelieving nation. Ministers must distinguish thus, that, when they speak terror to the wicked, they may not *make the hearts of the righteous sad*. *Bone Christiane, hoc nihil ad te—Good Christian, this is nothing to thee*. The prophet, having assured those that tremble at God's word of a gracious look from him (v. 2), here brings them a gracious message from him. The word of God has comforts in store for those that by true humiliation for sin are prepared to receive them. There were those (v. 4) who, when *God spoke*, would not hear; but, if some will not, others will. If the heart *tremble at the word*, the ear will be open to it. Now what is here said to them?

I. Let them know that God will plead their just but injured cause against their persecutors (v. 5): *Your brethren that hated you said, Let the Lord be glorified. But he shall appear to your joy*. This perhaps might have reference to the case of some of the Jews at their return out of captivity; but nothing like it appears in the history, and therefore it is rather to be referred to the first preachers and professors of the gospel among the Jews, to whose case it is very applicable. Observe, 1. How the faithful servants of God were persecuted: *Their brethren hated them*. The apostles were Jews by birth, and yet even in the cities of the Gentiles the Jews they met with there were their most bitter and implacable enemies and *stirred up the Gentiles* against them. The spouse complains (Cant. i. 6) that *her mother's children were angry with her*. Pilate upbraided our Lord Jesus with this, *Thy own nation have delivered thee unto me*, John xviii. 35. Their brethren, who should have loved them and encouraged them for their work's sake hated them, and cast them out of their synagogues, excommunicated them as if they had been the greatest blemishes, when they were really the greatest blessings, of their church and nation. This was a fruit of the old enmity in the *seed of the serpent* against the *seed of the woman*. Those that hated Christ hated his disciples, because they supported his kingdom and interest (John xv. 18), and they *cast them out for his name's sake*, because they were called by his name, and called upon his name, and laid out themselves to advance his name. Note, It is no new thing for church censures to be misapplied, and for her artillery, which was intended for her defence, to be turned against her best friends, by the treachery of



ner governors. And those that did this *said*, *Let the Lord be glorified*; they pretended conscience and a zeal for the honour of God and the church in it, and did it with all the formalities of devotion. Our Saviour explains this, and seems to have reference to it, John xvi. 2. *They shall put you out of their synagogues, and whosoever kills you will think that he does God service. In nomine Domini incipit omne malum*—In the name of the Lord commences evil of every kind. Or we may understand it as spoken in defiance of God. "You say God will be glorified in your deliverance; *let him be glorified then; let him make speed and hasten his work* (ch. v. 19); *let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.*" Some take it to be the language of the profane Jews in captivity, bantering their brethren that hoped for deliverance, and ridiculing the expectations they often comforted themselves with, that God would shortly be glorified in it. They thus did what they could to *shame the counsel of the poor*, Ps. xiv. 6. 2. How they were encouraged under these persecutions: "Let your faith and patience hold out yet a little while; your enemies hate you and oppress you, your brethren hate you and cast you out, but your Father in heaven loves you, and will appear for you when no one else will or dare. His providence shall order things so as shall be for comfort to you; he shall appear *for your joy* and for the confusion of those that abuse you and trample on you; *they shall be ashamed of their enmity to you.*" This was fulfilled when, upon the signals given of Jerusalem's approaching ruin, the *Jews' hearts failed them for fear*; but the disciples of Christ, whom they had hated and persecuted, *lifted up their heads with joy, knowing that their redemption drew nigh*, Luke xxi. 26, 28. Though God seem to hide himself, he will in due time show himself.

II. Let them know that God's appearances for them will be such as will make a great noise in the world (v. 6): *There shall be a voice of noise from the city, from the temple.* Some make it the joyful and triumphant voice of the church's friends, others the frightful lamenting voice of her enemies, surprised in the city, and fleeing in vain to the temple for shelter. These voices do but echo to the *voice of the Lord*, who is now rendering a *recompence to his enemies*; and those that will not hear him speaking this terror shall hear them returning the alarms of it in doleful shrieks. We may well think what a confused noise there was in the city and temple when Jerusalem, after a long siege, was at last taken by the Romans. Some think this prophecy was fulfilled in the prodigies that went before that destruction of Jerusalem, related by Josephus in his History of the Wars of the Jews (*lib. 7. cap. 31*), that the temple-doors flew open suddenly of their own accord, and the priests heard a noise of motion or shifting in the

most holy place, and presently a voice, saying, *Let us depart hence.* And, some time after, one Jesus Bar-Annas went up and down the city, at the feast of tabernacles, continually crying, *A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds, a voice against Jerusalem and the temple, a voice against all this people.*

III. Let them know that God will set up a church for himself in the world, which shall be abundantly replenished in a little time (v. 7): *Before she travailed she brought forth.* This is to be applied in the type to the deliverance of the Jews out of their captivity in Babylon, which was brought about very easily and silently, without any pain or struggle, such as was when they were brought out of Egypt; that was done by *might and power* (Deut. iv. 34), but this by the *Spirit of the Lord of hosts*, Zech. iv. 6. The man-child of the deliverance is rejoiced in, and yet the mother was never in labour for it; *before her pain came she was delivered.* This is altogether surprising, uncommon, and without precedent, unless in the story which the Egyptian midwives told of the Hebrew women (Exod. i. 19), that *they were lively and were delivered ere the midwives came in unto them.* But *shall the earth be made to bring forth her fruits in one day*? No, it is the work of some weeks in the spring to *renew the face of the earth* and cover it with its products. Some read this to the same purport with the next clause, *Shall a land be brought forth in one day, or shall a nation be born at once*? Is it to be imagined that a woman at one birth should bring children sufficient to people a country and that they should in an instant grow up to maturity? No; something like this was done in the creation; but God has since rested from all such works, and leaves second causes to produce their effects gradually. *Nihil facit per saltum*—He does nothing abruptly. Yet, in this case, *as soon as Zion travailed she brought forth.* Cyrus's proclamation was no sooner issued out than the captives were formed into a body and were ready to make the best of their way to their own land. And the reason is given (v. 9), *because it is the Lord's doing*; he undertakes it whose work is perfect. If he bring to the birth in preparing his people for deliverance, he will cause to bring forth in the accomplishment of the deliverance. When every thing is ripe and ready for their release, and the number of their months is accomplished, so that *the children are brought to the birth*, shall not I then give strength to bring forth, but leave mother and babe to perish together in the most miserable case? How will this agree with the divine pity? Shall I begin a work and not go through with it? How will that agree with the divine power and perfection? *Am I he that causes to bring forth* (so the following clause may be read) *and shall I restrain her*? Does God cause mankind, and

all the species of living creatures, to propagate, and replenish the earth, and will he restrain Zion? Will he not make her fruitful in a blessed offspring to replenish the church? Or, *Am I he that begat, and should I restrain from bringing forth?* Did God beget the deliverance in his purpose and promise, and will he not bring it forth in the accomplishment and performance of it? But this was a figure of the setting up of the Christian church in the world, and the replenishing of that family with children which was to be named from Jesus Christ. When the Spirit was poured out, and the gospel went forth from Zion, multitudes were converted in a little time and with little pains compared with the vast product. The apostles, even before they travailed, brought forth, and the children born to Christ were so numerous, and so suddenly and easily produced, that they were rather like the dew from the morning's womb than like the son from the mother's womb, Ps. cx. 3. The success of the gospel was astonishing; that light, like the morning, strangely diffused itself till it took hold even of the ends of the earth. Cities and nations were born at once to Christ. The same day that the Spirit was poured out there were 3000 souls added to the church. And, when this glorious work was once begun, it was carried on wonderfully, beyond what could be imagined, *so mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.* He that brought to the birth in conviction of sin caused to bring forth in a thorough conversion to God.

IV. Let them know that their present sorrows shall shortly be turned into abundant joys, v. 10, 11. Observe, 1. How the church's friends are described; they are such as *love her, and mourn* with her and *for her*. Note, All that love God love Jerusalem; they love the church of God, and lay its interest very near their heart. They admire the beauty of the church, take pleasure in communion with it, and heartily espouse its cause. And those that have a sincere affection for the church have a cordial sympathy with her in all the cares and sorrows of her militant state. They mourn for her; all her grievances are their griefs; if Jerusalem be in distress, their harps are hung on the willow-trees. 2. How they are encouraged: *Rejoice with her, and again and again I say, Rejoice.* This intimates that Jerusalem shall have cause to rejoice; the days of her mourning shall be at an end, and she shall be comforted according to the time that she has been afflicted. It is the will of God that all her friends should join with her in her joys, for they shall share with her in those blessings that will be the matter of her joy. If we suffer with Christ and sorrow with his church, we shall reign with him and rejoice with her. We are here called, (1.) To bear our part in the church's praises: "Come, rejoice with her, rejoice for joy with her, rejoice greatly,

rejoice and know why you rejoice, rejoice on the days appointed for public thanksgiving. You that mourned for her in her sorrows cannot but from the same principle rejoice with her in her joys." (2.) To take our part in the church's comforts. We must *suck and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations.* The word of God, the covenant of grace (especially the promises of that covenant), the ordinances of God, and all the opportunities of attending on him and conversing with him, are the breasts, which the church calls and counts the *breasts of her consolations*, where her comforts are laid up, and whence by faith and prayer they are drawn. With her therefore we must suck from these breasts, by an application of the promises of God to ourselves and a diligent attendance on his ordinances; and with the consolations which are drawn hence we must be satisfied, and not be dissatisfied though we have ever so little of earthly comforts. It is the glory of the church that she has the Lord for her God, that to her *pertain the adoption and the service of God*; and with the abundance of this glory we must be delighted. We must take more pleasure in our relation to God and communion with him than in all the delights of the sons and daughters of men. Whatever is the glory of the church must be *our glory and joy*, particularly her purity, unity, and increase.

V. Let them know that he who gives them this call to rejoice will give them cause to do so and hearts to do so, v. 12—14.

1. He will give them cause to do so. For, (1.) They shall enjoy a long uninterrupted course of prosperity: *I will extend, or am extending, peace to her* (that is, all good to her) *like a river* that runs in a constant stream, still increasing till it be swallowed up in the ocean. The gospel brings with it, wherever it is received in its power, such peace as this, which shall go on *like a river*, supplying souls with all good and making them fruitful, as a river does the lands it passes through, such a *river of peace* as the springs of the world's comforts cannot send forth and the dams of the world's troubles cannot stop nor drive back nor its sands rack up, such a river of peace as will carry us to the ocean of boundless and endless bliss. (2.) There shall be large and advantageous additions made to them: *The glory of the Gentiles* shall come to them *like a flowing stream*. Gentile converts shall come pouring into the church, and swell the river of her peace and prosperity; for they shall *bring their glory* with them; their wealth and honour, their power and interest, shall all be devoted to the service of God and employed for the good of the church: "Then shall you suck from the breasts of her consolations. When you see such crowding for a share in those comforts you shall be the more solicitous and the more vigorous to secure your share, not for fear of having the less for others coming in to



partake of Christ" (there is no danger of that; he has enough for all and enough for each), "*but their zeal shall provoke you to a holy jealousy.*" It is well when it does so, Rom. xi. 14; 2 Cor. ix. 2. (3.) God shall be glorified in all, and that ought to be more the matter of our joy than any thing else (v. 14): *The hand of the Lord shall be known towards his servants*, the protecting supporting hand of his almighty power, the supplying enriching hand of his inexhaustible goodness; the benefit which his servants have by both these *shall be known* to his glory as well as theirs. And, to make this the more illustrious, he will at the same time make known his *indignation towards his enemies*. God's mercy and justice shall both be manifested and for ever magnified.

2. God will not only give them cause to rejoice, but will speak comfort to them, will speak it to *their hearts*; and it is he only that can do that, and make it fasten there. See what he will do for the comfort of all the sons of Zion. (1.) Their country shall be their tender nurse: You shall be *carried on her sides*, under her arms, as little children are, and shall be *dandled upon her knees*, as darlings are, especially when they are weary and out of humour, and must be got to sleep. Those that are joined to the church must be treated thus affectionately. The great Shepherd *gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them in his bosom*, and so must the under-shepherds, that they may not be discouraged. Proselytes should be favourites. (2.) God will himself be their powerful comforter: *As one whom his mother comforts*, when he is sick or sore, or upon any account in sorrow, *so will I comfort you*; not only with the rational arguments which a prudent father uses, but with the tender affections and compassions of a loving mother, that bemoans her afflicted child when it has fallen and hurt itself, that she may quiet it and make it easy, or endeavours to pacify it after she has chidden it and fallen out with it (Jer. xxxi. 20): *Since I spoke against him, my bowels are troubled for him*; he is a dear son, he is a pleasant child. Thus the mother comforts. *Thus you shall be comforted in Jerusalem*, in the favours bestowed on the church, which you shall partake of, and in the thanksgivings offered by the church, which you shall concur with. (3.) They shall feel the blessed effects of this comfort in their own souls (v. 13): *When you see this*, what a happy state the church is restored to, not only your tongues and your countenances, but *your hearts shall rejoice*. This was fulfilled in the wonderful satisfaction which Christ's disciples had in the success of their ministry. Christ, with an eye to that, tells them (John xvi. 22), *Your heart shall rejoice and your joy no man taketh from you*. Then *your bones*, that were dried and withered (the marrow of them quite exhausted), shall recover a youthful strength

and vigour and *shall flourish like a herb*. Divine comforts reach the inward man; *they are marrow* and moistening to the bones, Prov. iii. 8. The bones are the strength of the body; those shall be made to flourish with these comforts. *The joy of the Lord will be your strength*, Neh. viii. 10.

15 For, behold, the LORD will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. 16 For by fire and by his sword will the LORD plead with all flesh: and the slain of the LORD shall be many. 17 They that sanctify themselves, and purify themselves in the gardens behind one tree in the midst, eating swine's flesh, and the abomination, and the mouse, shall be consumed together, saith the LORD. 18 For I know their works and their thoughts: it shall come, that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come, and see my glory. 19 And I will set a sign among them, and I will send those that escape of them unto the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, that draw the bow, to Tubal, and Javan, to the isles afar off, that have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles. 20 And they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the LORD out of all nations, upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, saith the LORD, as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the LORD. 21 And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, saith the LORD. 22 For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain. 23 And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the LORD. 24 And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire

be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.

These verses, like the pillar of cloud and fire, have a dark side towards the enemies of God's kingdom and all that are rebels against his crown, and a bright side towards his faithful loyal subjects. Probably they refer to the Jews in captivity in Babylon, of whom some are said to have been sent thither for their hurt, and with them God here threatens to proceed in his controversy; they hated to be reformed, and therefore should be ruined by the calamity (Jer. xxiv. 9); others were sent thither for their good, and they should have the trouble sanctified to them, should in due time get well through it and see many a good day after it. Many of the expressions here used are accommodated to that glorious dispensation; but doubtless the prophecy looks further, to the judgment for which Christ did come once, and will come again, into this world, and to the distinction which his word in both makes *between the precious and the vile*.

I. Christ will appear to the confusion and terror of all those that stand it out against him. Sometimes he will appear in temporal judgments. The Jews that persisted in infidelity were cut off *by fire* and *by his sword*. The ruin was very extensive; *the Lord* then *pleaded with all flesh*; and, it being his sword with which they are cut off, they are called *his slain*, sacrificed to his justice, and they *shall be many*. In the great day the wrath of God will be his fire and sword, with which he will cut off and consume all the impenitent; and his word, when it takes hold of sinners' consciences, burns like fire, and is sharper *than any two-edged sword*. Idolaters will especially be contended with in the day of wrath, v. 17. Perhaps some of those who returned out of Babylon retained such instances of idolatry and superstition as are here mentioned, had their *idols in their gardens* (not daring to set them up publicly in the high places) and there *purified themselves* (as the worshippers of the true God used to do) when they went about their idolatrous rites, *one after another*, or, as we read it, *behind one tree in the midst*, behind *Ahad* or *Ehad*, some idol that they worshipped by that name and in honour of which they *ate swine's flesh* (which was expressly forbidden by the law of God), and *other abominations, as the mouse*, or some other like animal. But the prophecy may refer to all those judgments which the wrath of God, according to the word of God, will bring upon provoking sinners, that live in contempt of God and are devoted to the world and the flesh: *They shall be consumed together*. From the happiness of heaven we find expressly excluded all *idolaters, and whosoever worketh abomination*, Rev. xxi. 27; xxii. 15. In the day of vengeance secret wickedness will be brought to light and

brought to the account; for (v. 18), *I know their works and their thoughts*. God knows both what men do and from what principle and with what design they do it; and therefore is fit to judge the world, because he can *judge the secrets of men*, Rom. ii. 16.

II. He will appear to the comfort and joy of all that are faithful to him in the setting up of his kingdom in this world, the kingdom of grace, the earnest and first-fruits of the kingdom of glory. The time shall come that he will *gather all nations and tongues to himself*, that they may come and see *his glory* as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ, v. 18. This was fulfilled when all nations were to be disciplined and the gift of tongues was bestowed in order thereunto. The church had hitherto been confined to one nation and in one tongue only God was worshipped; but in the days of the Messiah the partition-wall should be taken down, and those that had been strangers to God should be brought acquainted with him and should *see his glory* in the gospel, as the Jews had seen it *in the sanctuary*. As to this, it is here promised,

1. That some of the Jewish nation should, by the grace of God, be distinguished from the rest, and marked for salvation: I will not only set up a *gathering ensign* among them, to which the Gentiles shall seek (as is promised, ch. xi. 12), but there shall be those among them on whom *I will set a differing sign*; for so the words signify. Though they are a corrupt degenerate nation, yet God will set apart a remnant of them, that shall be devoted to him and employed for him, and a mark shall be set upon them, with such certainty will God own them, Ezek. ix. 4. The *servants of God* shall be *sealed in their foreheads*, Rev. vii. 3. The Lord knows those that are his. Christ's sheep are marked.

2. That those who are themselves distinguished thus by the grace of God shall be commissioned to invite others to come and take the benefit of that grace. Those that escape the power of those prejudices by which the generality of that nation is kept in unbelief shall be *sent to the nations* to carry the gospel among them, and preach it to every creature. Note, Those who themselves have escaped the wrath to come should do all they can to snatch others also as brands out of the burning. God chooses to send those on his errands that can deliver their message feelingly and experimentally, and warn people of their danger by sin as those who have themselves narrowly escaped the danger. (1.) They shall be *sent to the nations*, several of which are here named, Tarshish, and Pul, and Lud, &c. It is uncertain, nor are interpreters agreed, what countries are here intended. *Tarshish* signifies in general *the sea*, yet some take it for Tarsus in Cilicia. *Pul* is mentioned sometimes as the name of one of the kings of Assyria; perhaps some part of that country



might likewise bear that name. *Lud* is supposed to be Lydia, a warlike nation, famed for archers: the Lydians are said to *handle and bend the bow*, Jer. xlv. 9. *Tubal*, some think, is Italy or Spain; and *Javan* most agree to be Greece, the Iones; and the *isles of the Gentiles*, that were peopled by the posterity of Japhet (Gen. x. 5), probably are here meant by the *isles afar off, that have not heard my name, neither have seen my glory*. In Judah only was God known, and there only his name was great for many ages. Other countries sat in darkness, heard not the joyful sound, saw not the joyful light. This deplorable state of theirs seems to be spoken of here with compassion; for it is a pity that any of the children of men should be at such a distance from their Maker as not to hear his name and see his glory. In consideration of this, (2.) Those that are sent to the nations shall go upon God's errand, to *declare his glory among the Gentiles*. The Jews that shall be dispersed among the nations shall declare the glory of God's providence concerning their nation all along, by which many shall be invited to join with them, as also by the appearances of God's glory among them in his ordinances. Some out of all languages of the nations shall *take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew*, entreating him to take notice of them, to admit them into his company, and to stay a little while for them, till they are ready, "*for we will go with you, having heard that God is with you*," Zech. viii. 23. Thus the glory of God was in part declared among the Gentiles; but more clearly and fully by the apostles and early preachers of the gospel, who were sent into all the world, even to the isles afar off, to publish the glorious gospel of the blessed God. *They went forth and preached every where, the Lord working with them*, Mark xvi. 20.

3. That many converts shall hereby be made, v. 20.

(1.) *They shall bring all your brethren* (for proselytes ought to be owned and embraced as brethren) *for an offering unto the Lord*. God's glory shall not be in vain declared to them, but they shall be both invited and directed to join themselves to the Lord. Those that are sent to them shall succeed so well in their negotiation that thereupon there shall be as great flocking to Jerusalem as used to be at the time of a solemn feast, when all the males from all parts of the country were to attend there, and not to appear empty. Observe, [1.] The conveniences that they shall be furnished with for their coming. Some shall come *upon horses*, because they came from far and the journey was too long to travel on foot, as the Jews usually did to their feasts. Persons of quality shall come in *chariots*, and the aged, and sickly, and little children, shall be brought in *litters* or covered waggon, and the young men on *mules and swift beasts*. This intimates their zeal and for-

wardness to come. They shall spare no trouble nor charge to get to Jerusalem. Those that cannot ride on horseback shall come in litters; and in such haste shall they be, and so impatient of delay, that those that can shall ride upon mules and swift beasts. These expressions are figurative, and these various means of conveyance are heaped up to intimate (says the learned Mr. Gataker) the abundant provision of all those gracious helps requisite for the bringing of God's elect home to Christ. All shall be welcome, and nothing shall be wanting for their assistance and encouragement. [2.] The character under which they shall be brought. They shall come, not as formerly they used to come to Jerusalem, to be offerers, but to be themselves *an offering unto the Lord*, which must be understood spiritually, of their being presented to God as *living sacrifices*, Rom. xii. 1. The apostle explains this, and perhaps refers to it, Rom. xv. 16, where he speaks of his *ministering the gospel to the Gentiles*, that the *offering up, or sacrificing, of the Gentiles might be acceptable*. They shall offer themselves, and those who are the instruments of their conversion shall offer them, as the spoils which they have taken for Christ and which are devoted to his service and honour. They shall be brought *as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel*, with great care that they be holy, purified from sin, and sanctified to God. It is said of the converted Gentiles (Acts xv. 9) that *their hearts were purified by faith*. Whatever was brought to God was brought in a clean vessel, a vessel appropriated to religious uses. God will be served and honoured in the way that he has appointed, in the ordinances of his own institution, which are the proper vehicles for these spiritual offerings. When the soul is offered up to God the body must be a clean vessel for it, possessed in *sanctification and honour, and not in the lusts of uncleanness* (1 Thess. iv. 4, 5); and converts to Christ are not only *purged from an evil conscience*, but have their *bodies also washed with pure water*, Heb. x. 22. Now,

(2.) This may refer, [1.] To the Jews, devout men, and proselytes out of every nation under heaven, that flocked together to Jerusalem, expecting the kingdom of the Messiah to appear, Acts ii. 5, 6, 10. They came from all parts to the *holy mountain of Jerusalem*, as an *offering to the Lord*, and there many of them were brought to the faith of Christ by the gift of tongues poured out on the apostles. Methinks there is some correspondence between that history and this prophecy. The eunuch some time after came to worship at Jerusalem in his chariot and took home with him the knowledge of Christ and his holy religion. [2.] To the Gentiles, some of all nations, that should be converted to Christ, and so added to his church, which, though a spiritual accession,



is often in prophecy represented by a local motion. The apostle says of all true Christians that they have come to Mount Zion, and the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. xii. 22), which explains this passage, and shows that the meaning of all this parade is only that they shall be brought into the church by the grace of God, and in the use of the means of that grace, as carefully, safely, and comfortably, as if they were carried in chariots and litters. Thus God shall persuade Japhet and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem, Gen. ix. 27.

4. That a gospel ministry shall be set up in the church, it being thus enlarged by the addition of such a multitude of members to it (v. 21): *I will take of them* (of the proselytes, of the Gentile converts) *for priests and for Levites*, to minister in holy things and to preside in their religious assemblies, which is very necessary for doctrine, worship, and discipline. Hitherto the priests and Levites were all taken from among the Jews and were all of one tribe; but in gospel times God will take of the converted Gentiles to minister to him in holy things, to teach the people, to bless them in the name of the Lord, to be the stewards of the mysteries of God as the priests and Levites were under the law, to be pastors and teachers (or bishops), to give themselves to the word and prayer, and deacons to serve tables, and, as the Levites, to take care of the outward business of the house of God, Phil. i. 1; Acts vi. 2—4. The apostles were all Jews, and so were the seventy disciples; the great apostle of the Gentiles was himself a Hebrew of the Hebrews; but, when churches were planted among the Gentiles, they had ministers settled who were of themselves, elders in every church (Acts xiv. 23, Tit. i. 5), which made the ministry to spread the more easily, and to be the more familiar, and, if not the more venerable, yet the more acceptable; gospel grace, it might be hoped, would cure people of those corruptions which kept a prophet from having honour in his own country. God says, *I will take, not all of them*, though they are all in a spiritual sense made to our God kings and priests, but of them, some of them. It is God's work originally to choose ministers by qualifying them for and inclining them to the service, as well as to make ministers by giving them their commission. *I will take them*, that is, I will admit them, though Gentiles, and will accept of them and their ministrations. This is a great honour and advantage to the Gentile church, as it was to the Jewish church that God raised up of their sons for prophets and their young men for Nazarites, Amos ii. 11.

5. That the church and ministry, being thus settled, shall continue and be kept up in a succession from one generation to another, v. 22. The change that will be made by the setting up of the kingdom of the Messiah is here described to be, (1.) A very great and universal change; it shall be a new

world, the new heavens and the new earth promised before, ch. lxxv. 17. *Old things have passed away, behold all things have become new* (2 Cor. v. 17), the old covenant of peculiarity is set aside, and a new covenant, a covenant of grace, established, Heb. viii. 13. We are now to serve in newness of the spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter, Rom. vii. 6. New commandments are given relating both to heaven and earth, and new promises relating to both, and both together make a New Testament; so that they are new heavens and a new earth that God will create, and these a preparative for the new heavens and new earth designed at the end of time, 2 Pet. iii. 13. (2.) A change of God's own making; he will create the new heavens and the new earth. The change was made by him that had authority to make new ordinances, as well as power to make new worlds. (3.) It will be an abiding lasting change, a change never to be changed, a new world that will be always new, and never wax old, as that does which is ready to vanish away. *It shall remain before me unalterable*; for the gospel dispensation is to continue to the end of time and not to be succeeded by any other. The kingdom of Christ is a kingdom that cannot be moved; the laws and privileges of it are things that cannot be shaken, but shall for ever remain, Heb. xii. 27, 28. It shall therefore remain, because it is before God; it is under his eye, and care, and special protection. (4.) It will be maintained in a seed that shall serve Christ: *Your seed, and in them your name, shall remain*—a seed of ministers, a seed of Christians; as one generation of both passes away, another generation shall come; and thus the name of Christ, with that of Christians, shall continue on earth while the earth remains, and his throne as the days of heaven. The gates of hell, though they fight against the church, shall not prevail, nor wear out the saints of the Most High.

6. That the public worship of God in religious assemblies shall be carefully and constantly attended upon by all that are thus brought as an offering to the Lord, v. 23. This is described in expressions suited to the Old-Testament dispensation, to show that though the ceremonial law should be abolished, and the temple service should come to an end, yet God should be still as regularly, constantly, and acceptably worshipped as ever. Heretofore only Jews went up to appear before God, and they were bound to attend only three times a year, and the males only; but now all flesh, Gentiles as well as Jews, women as well as men, shall come and worship before God, in his presence, though not in his temple at Jerusalem, but in religious assemblies dispersed all the world over, which shall be to them as the tabernacle of meeting was to the Jews. God will in them record his name, and, though but two or three come together, he will be among them,



will meet them, and bless them. And they shall have the benefit of these holy convocations frequently, every new moon and every sabbath, not, as formerly, at the three annual feasts only. There is no necessity of one certain place, as the temple was of old. Christ is our temple, in whom by faith all believers meet, and now that the church is so far extended it is impossible that all should meet at one place; but it is fit that there should be a certain time appointed, that the service may be done certainly and frequently, and a token thereby given of the spiritual communion which all Christian assemblies have with each other by faith, hope, and holy love. The *new moons* and the *sabbaths* are mentioned because, under the law, though the yearly feasts were to be celebrated at Jerusalem, yet the new moons and the sabbaths were religiously observed all the country over, in the *schools of the prophets* first and afterwards in the *synagogues* (2 Kings iv. 23, Amos viii. 5, Acts xv. 21), according to the model of which Christian assemblies seem to be formed. Where the Lord's day is weekly sanctified, and the Lord's supper monthly celebrated, and both are duly attended on, there this promise is fulfilled, there the Christian new moons and sabbaths are observed. See, here, (1.) That God is to be worshipped in solemn assemblies, and that it is the duty of all, as they have opportunity, to wait upon God in those assemblies: *All flesh must come*; though flesh, weak, corrupt, and sinful, let them come that the flesh may be mortified. (2.) In worshipping God we present ourselves before him, and are in a special manner in his presence. (3.) For doing this there ought to be stated times, and are so; and we must see that it is our interest as well as our duty constantly and conscientiously to observe these times.

7. That their thankful sense of God's distinguishing favour to them should be very much increased by the consideration of the fearful doom and destruction of those that persist and perish in their infidelity and impiety. v. 24. Those that have been worshipping the Lord of hosts, and rejoicing before him in the goodness of his house, shall, in order to affect themselves the more with their own happiness, take a view of the misery of the wicked. Observe, (1.) Who they are whose misery is here described. They are men that have *transgressed against God*, not only broken his laws, but broken covenant with him, and thought themselves able to contend with him. It may be meant

especially of the unbelieving Jews that rejected the gospel of Christ. (2.) What their misery is. It is here represented by the frightful spectacle of a field of battle, covered with the *carcasses* of the slain, that lie rotting above ground, full of *worms* crawling about them and feeding on them; and, if you go to burn them, they are so scattered, and it is such a noisome piece of work to get them together, that it would be *endless*, and the *fire would never be quenched*; so that they are an *abhorring to all flesh*, nobody cares to come near them. Now this is sometimes accomplished in temporal judgments, and perhaps never nearer the letter than in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation by the Romans, in which destruction it is computed that above two millions, first and last, were cut off by the sword, besides what perished by famine and pestilence. It may refer likewise to the spiritual judgments that came upon the unbelieving Jews, which St. Paul looks upon, and shows us, Rom. xi. 8, &c. They became dead in sins, twice dead. The church of the Jews was a *carcass* of a church; all its members were putrid carcasses; *their worm died not*, their own consciences made them continually uneasy, and the fire of their rage against the gospel was not quenched, which was their punishment as well as their sin; and they became, more than ever any nation under the sun, an *abhorring to all flesh*. But our Saviour applies it to the everlasting misery and torment of impenitent sinners in the future state, where *their worm dies not*, and *their fire is not quenched* (Mark ix. 44); for the soul, whose conscience is its constant tormentor, is immortal, and God, whose wrath is its constant terror, is eternal. (3.) What notice shall be taken of it. Those that worship God shall *go forth and look upon them*, to affect their own hearts with the love of their Redeemer, when they see what misery they are redeemed from. As it will aggravate the miseries of the damned to see others in the kingdom of heaven and *themselves thrust out* (Luke xiii. 28), so it will illustrate the joys and glories of the blessed to see what becomes of those that died in their transgression, and it will elevate their praises to think that they were themselves as brands plucked out of that burning. To the honour of that free grace which thus distinguished them let the redeemed of the Lord with all humility, and not without a holy trembling, sing their triumphant songs.

AN  
EXPOSITION,  
WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,  
OF THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET

J E R E M I A H.

THE Prophecies of the Old Testament, as the Epistles of the New, are placed rather according to their bulk than their seniority—the longest first, not the oldest. There were several prophets, and writing ones, that were contemporaries with Isaiah, as Micah, or a little before him, as Hosea, and Joel, and Amos, or soon after him, as Habakkuk and Nahum are supposed to have been; and yet the prophecy of Jeremiah, who began many years after Isaiah finished, is placed next to his, because there is so much in it. Where we meet with most of God's word, there let the preference be given; and yet those of less gifts are not to be despised nor excluded. Nothing now occurs to be observed further concerning prophecy in general; but concerning this prophet Jeremiah we may observe, I. That he was betimes a prophet; he began young, and therefore could say, from his own experience, that it is good for a man to *bear the yoke in his youth*, the yoke both of service and of affliction, Lam. iii. 27. Jerome observes that Isaiah, who had more years over his head, had his tongue touched with a coal of fire, to purge away his iniquity (*ch. vi. 7*), but that when God touched Jeremiah's mouth, who was yet but young, nothing was said of the purging of his iniquity (*ch. i. 9*), because, by reason of his tender years, he had not so much sin to answer for. II. That he continued long a prophet, some reckon fifty years, others above forty. He began in the thirteenth year of Josiah, when things went well under that good king, but he continued through all the wicked reigns that followed; for when we set out for the service of God, though the wind may then be fair and favourable, we know not how soon it may turn and be tempestuous. III. That he was a reproofing prophet, was sent in God's name to tell Jacob of their sins and to warn them of the judgments of God that were coming upon them; and the critics observe that therefore his style or manner of speaking is more plain and rough, and less polite, than that of Isaiah and some others of the prophets. Those that are sent to discover sin ought to lay aside the enticing words of man's wisdom. Plain-dealing is best when we are dealing with sinners to bring them to repentance. IV. That he was a weeping prophet; so he is commonly called, not only because he penned the Lamentations, but because he was all along a mournful spectator of the sins of his people and of the desolating judgments that were coming upon them. And for this reason, perhaps, those who imagined our Saviour to be one of the prophets thought him of any of them to be most like to Jeremiah (Matt. xvi. 14), because he was *a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*. V. That he was a suffering prophet. He was persecuted by his own people more than any of them, as we shall find in the story of this book; for he lived and preached just before the Jews' destruction by the Chaldeans, when their character seems to have been the same as it was just before their destruction by the Romans, when they *killed the Lord Jesus, and persecuted his disciples, pleased not God, and were contrary to all men, for wrath had come upon them to the uttermost*, 1 Thess. ii. 15, 16. The last account we have of him in his history is that the remaining Jews forced him to go down with them into Egypt; whereas the current tradition is, among Jews and Christians, that he suffered martyrdom. Hottinger, out of Elmakin, an Arabic historian, relates that, continuing to prophesy in Egypt against the Egyptians and other nations, he was stoned to death; and that long after, when Alexander entered Egypt, he took up the bones of Jeremiah where they were buried in obscurity, and carried them to Alexandria, and buried them there. The prophecies of this book which we have in the first nineteen chapters seem to be the heads of the sermons he preached in a way of general reproof for sin and denunciation of judgment; afterwards they are more particular and occasional, and mixed with the history of his day, but not placed in due order of time. With the threatenings are intermixed many gracious promises of mercy to the penitent, of the deliverance of the Jews out of their captivity, and some that have a plain reference to the kingdom of the Messiah. Among the Apocryphal writings an epistle is extant said to be written by Jeremiah to the captives in Babylon, warning them against the worship of idols, by exposing the vanity of idols and the folly of idolaters. It is in Baruch, *ch. vi*. But it is supposed not to be authentic; nor has it, I think, any thing like the life and spirit of Jeremiah's writings. It is also related concerning Jeremiah (2 Mac. ii. 4) that, when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Chaldeans, he, by



direction from God, took the ark and the altar of incense, and, carrying them to Mount Nebo lodged them in a hollow cave there and stopped the door; but some that followed him, and thought that they had marked the place, could not find it. He blamed them for seeking it, telling them that the place should be unknown till the time that God should gather his people together again. But I know not what credit is to be given to that story, though it is there said to be found in the records. We cannot but be concerned, in the reading of Jeremiah's prophecies, to find that they were so little regarded by the men of that generation; but let us make use of that as a reason why we should regard them the more; for they are written for our learning too and for warning to us and to our land.

## CHAP. I.

In this chapter we have, I. The general inscription or title of this book, with the time of the continuance of Jeremiah's public ministry, ver. 1—3. II. The call of Jeremiah to the prophetic office, his modest objection against it answered, and an ample commission given him for the execution of it, ver. 4—10. III. The visions of an almond-rod and a seething-pot, signifying the approaching ruin of Judah and Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, ver. 11—16. IV. Encouragement given to the prophet to go on undauntedly in his work, in an assurance of God's presence with him, ver. 17—19. Thus is he set to work by one that will be sure to bear him out.

**T**HE words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests that were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin: 2 To whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. 3 It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, unto the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah king of Judah, unto the carrying away of Jerusalem captive in the fifth month.

We have here as much as it was thought fit we should know of the genealogy of this prophet and the chronology of this prophecy. 1. We are told what family the prophet was of. He was the son of Hilkiah, not that Hilkiah, it is supposed, who was high priest in Josiah's time (for then he would have been called so, and not, as here, one of the priests that were in Anathoth), but another of the same name. Jeremiah signifies one raised up by the Lord. It is said of Christ that he is a prophet whom the Lord our God raised up unto us, Deut. xviii. 15, 18. He was of the priests, and, as a priest, was authorized and appointed to teach the people; but to that authority and appointment God added the extraordinary commission of a prophet. Ezekiel also was a priest. Thus God would support the honour of the priesthood at a time when, by their sins and God's judgments upon them, it was sadly eclipsed. He was of the priests in Anathoth, a city of priests, which lay about three miles from Jerusalem. Abiathar had his country house there, 1 Kings ii. 26. 2. We have the general date of his prophecies, the knowledge of which is requisite to the understanding of them. (1.) He began to prophesy in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign, v. 2. Josiah, in the twelfth year of his reign, began a work of reformation, applied himself with all sincerity to purge Judah and Jerusalem

from the high places, and the groves, and the images, 2 Chron. xxxiv. 3. And very seasonably then was this young prophet raised up to assist and encourage the young king in that good work. Then the word of the Lord came to him, not only a charge and commission to him to prophesy, but a revelation of the things themselves which he was to deliver. As it is an encouragement to ministers to be countenanced and protected by such pious magistrates as Josiah was, so it is a great help to magistrates, in any good work of reformation, to be advised and animated, and to have a great deal of their work done for them, by such faithful zealous ministers as Jeremiah was. Now, one would have expected when these two joined forces, such a prince, and such a prophet (as in a like case, Ezra v. 1, 2), and both young, such a complete reformation would be brought about and settled as would prevent the ruin of the church and state; but it proved quite otherwise. In the eighteenth year of Josiah we find there were a great many of the relics of idolatry that were not purged out; for what can the best princes and prophets do to prevent the ruin of a people that hate to be reformed? And therefore, though it was a time of reformation, Jeremiah continued to foretell the destroying judgments that were coming upon them; for there is no symptom more threatening to any people than fruitless attempts of reformation. Josiah and Jeremiah would have healed them, but they would not be healed. (2.) He continued to prophesy through the reigns of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, each of whom reigned eleven years. He prophesied to the carrying away of Jerusalem captive (v. 3), that great event which he had so often prophesied of. He continued to prophesy after that, ch. xl. 1. But the computation here is made to end with that because it was the accomplishment of many of his predictions; and from the thirteenth of Josiah to the captivity was just forty years. Dr. Lightfoot observes that as Moses was so long with the people, a teacher in the wilderness, till they entered into their own land, Jeremiah was so long in their own land a teacher, before they went into the wilderness of the heathen: and he thinks that therefore a special mark is set upon the last forty years of the iniquity of Judah, which Ezekiel bore forty days, a day for a year, because during all that time they had Jeremiah prophesying among them.

which was a great aggravation of their impenitency. God, in this prophet, suffered their manners, their ill manners, forty years, and at length swore in his wrath that they should not continue in his rest.

4 Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 5 Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. 6 Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I *am* a child. 7 But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I *am* a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. 8 Be not afraid of their faces: for I *am* with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD. 9 Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. 10 See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.

Here is, I. Jeremiah's early designation to the work and office of a prophet, which God gives him notice of as a reason for his early application to that business (v. 4, 5): *The word of the Lord came to him*, with a satisfying assurance to himself that it was the word of the Lord and not a delusion; and God told him, 1. That he had *ordained him a prophet to the nations, or against the nations*, the nation of the Jews in the first place, who are now *reckoned among the nations* because they had learned their works and mingled with them in their idolatries, for otherwise they would not have been numbered with them, Num. xxiii. 9. Yet he was given to be a prophet, not to the Jews only, but to the neighbouring nations, to whom he was to *send yokes* (ch. xxvii. 2, 3) and whom he must make to *drink of the cup* of the Lord's anger, ch. xxv. 17. He is still in his writings a prophet to the nations (to our nation among the rest), to tell them what the national judgments are which may be expected for national sins. It would be well for the nations would they take Jeremiah for their prophet and attend to the warnings he gives them. 2. That before he was born, even in his eternal counsel, he had designed him to be so. Let him know that he who gave him his commission is the same that gave him his being, that *formed him in the belly* and brought him *forth out of the womb*, that therefore he was his rightful owner and might employ him and make

use of him as he pleased, and that this commission was given him in pursuance of the purpose God had purposed in himself concerning him, before he was born: "*I knew thee, and I sanctified thee*," that is, "I determined that thou shouldst be a prophet and set thee apart for the office." Thus St. Paul says of himself that God had *separated him from his mother's womb* to be a Christian and an apostle, Gal. i. 15. Observe, (1.) The great Creator knows what use to make of every man before he makes him. He has *made all for himself*, and of the same lumps of clay designs a *vessel of honour or dishonour*, as he pleases, Rom. ix. 21. (2.) What God has designed men for he will call them to; for his purposes cannot be frustrated. Known unto God are all his own works beforehand, and his knowledge is infallible and his purpose unchangeable. (3.) There is a particular purpose and providence of God conversant about his prophets and ministers; they are by special counsel designed for their work, and what they are designed for they are fitted for: I that *knew thee, sanctified thee*. God destines them to it, and forms them for it, when he first forms the spirit of man within him. *Propheta nascitur, non fit—Original endowment, not education, makes a prophet.*

II. His modestly declining this honourable employment, v. 6. Though God had predestinated him to it, yet it was news to him, and a mighty surprise, to hear that he should be *a prophet to the nations*. We know not what God intends us for, but he knows. One would have thought he would catch at it as a piece of preferment, for so it was; but he objects against it, as a work for which he is unqualified. "*Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak* to great men and multitudes, as prophets must; I cannot speak finely nor fluently, cannot word things well, as a message from God should be worded; I cannot speak with any authority, nor can expect to be heeded, *for I am a child* and my youth will be despised." Note, It becomes us, when we have any service to do for God, to be afraid lest we mismanage it, and lest it suffer through our weakness and unfitness for it; it becomes us likewise to have low thoughts of ourselves and to be diffident of our own sufficiency. Those that are young should consider that they are so, should be afraid, as Elihu was, and not venture beyond their length.

III. The assurance God graciously gave him that he would stand by him and carry him on in his work.

1. Let him not object that he is a child; he shall be a prophet for all that (v. 7): "*Say not any more, I am a child*. It is true thou art; but," (1.) "Thou hast God's precept, and let not thy being young hinder thee from obeying it. Go to all to whom I shall send thee and speak whatsoever I command thee." Note, Though a sense of our



own weakness and insufficiency should make us go humbly about our work, yet it should not make us draw back from it when God calls us to it. God was angry with Moses even for his modest excuses, Exod. iv. 14. (2.) "Thou hast God's presence, and let not thy being young discourage thee from depending upon it. Though thou art a child, thou shalt be *enabled to go to all to whom I shall send thee*, though they are ever so great and ever so many. And *whatsoever I command thee* thou shalt have judgment, memory, and language, wherewith to speak it as it should be spoken." Samuel delivered a message from God to Eli, when he was a little child. Note, God can, when he pleases, make children prophets, and *ordain strength out of the mouth of babes and sucklings*.

2. Let him not object that he shall meet with many enemies and much opposition; God will be his protector (v. 8): "*Be not afraid of their faces*; though they look big, and so think to outface thee and put thee out of countenance, yet *be not afraid to speak to them*; no, not to speak that to them which is most displeasing. Thou speakest in the name of the King of kings, and by authority from him, and with that thou mayest *face them down*. Though they look angry, be not afraid of their displeasure nor disturbed with apprehensions of the consequences of it." Those that have messages to deliver from God must not be *afraid of the face of man*, Ezek. iii. 9. "And thou hast cause both to be bold and easy; for *I am with thee*, not only to assist thee in thy work, but to deliver thee out of the hands of the persecutors; and, *if God be for thee, who can be against thee?*" If God do not deliver his ministers from trouble, it is to the same effect if he support them under their trouble. Mr. Gataker well observes here, That earthly princes are not wont to go along with their ambassadors; but God goes along with those whom he sends, and is, by his powerful protection, at all times and in all places present with them; and with this they ought to animate themselves, Acts xviii. 10.

3. Let him not object that he cannot speak as becomes him—God will enable him to speak.

(1.) To speak intelligently, and as one that had acquaintance with God, v. 9. He having now a vision of the divine glory, the Lord *put forth his hand*, and by a sensible sign conferred upon him so much of the gift of the tongue as was necessary for him: *He touched his mouth*, and with that touch *opened his lips*, that his mouth should show forth God's praise, with that touch sweetly conveyed *his words into his mouth*, to be ready to him upon all occasions, so that he could never want words who was thus furnished by him that *made man's mouth*. God not only put knowledge into his head, but *words into his mouth*; for there are *words which the Holy Ghost teaches*, 1 Cor. ii. 13. It is fit God's message should be delivered in his

own words, 'That it may be delivered accurately. Ezek. iii. 4, *Speak with my words*. And those that faithfully do so shall not want instructions as the case requires; God will give them a mouth and wisdom in *that same hour*, Matt. x. 19.

(2.) To speak powerfully, and as one that had authority from God, v. 10. It is a strange commission that is here given him: *See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms*. This sounds very great, and yet Jeremiah is a poor despicable priest still; he is not set over the kingdoms as a prince to rule them by the sword, but as a prophet by the power of the word of God. Those that would hence prove the pope's supremacy over kings, and his authority to depose them and dispose of their kingdoms at his pleasure, must prove that he has the same extraordinary spirit of prophecy that Jeremiah had, else how can he have the power that Jeremiah had by virtue of that spirit? And yet the power that Jeremiah had (who, notwithstanding his power, lived in meanness and contempt, and under oppression) would not content these proud men. Jeremiah was *set over the nations*, the Jewish nation in the first place, and other nations, some great ones besides, against whom he prophesied; he was set over them, not to demand tribute from them nor to enrich himself with their spoils, but to *root out, and pull down, and destroy*, and yet *withal to build and plant*. [1.] He must attempt to reform the nations, to *root out, and pull down, and destroy* idolatry and other wickednesses among them, to extirpate those vicious habits and customs which had long taken root, to *throw down* the kingdom of sin, that religion and virtue might be *planted and built* among them. And, to the introducing and establishing of that which is good, it is necessary that that which is evil be removed. [2.] He must tell them that it would be well or ill with them according as they were, or were not, reformed. He must set before them *life and death, good and evil*, according to God's declaration of the method he takes with kingdoms and nations, ch. xviii. 7—10. He must assure those who persisted in their wickedness that they should be *rooted out and destroyed*, and those who repented that they should be *built and planted*. He was authorized to read the doom of nations, and God would *ratify it and fulfil it* (Isa. xlv. 26), would do it according to his word, and therefore is said to do it *by his word*. It is thus expressed partly to show how sure the word of prophecy is—it will as certainly be accomplished as if it were done already, and partly to put an honour upon the prophetic office and make it look truly great, that others may not despise the prophets nor they disparage themselves. And yet more honourable does the gospel ministry look, in that declarative power Christ gave his apostles to *remit and*

retain sin (John xx. 23), to bind and loose, Matt. xviii. 18.

11 Moreover, the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Jeremiah, what seest thou? And I said, I see a rod of an almond-tree. 12 Then said the LORD unto me, Thou hast well seen: for I will hasten my word to perform it. 13 And the word of the LORD came unto me the second time, saying, What seest thou? And I said, I see a seething-pot; and the face thereof is towards the north. 14 Then the LORD said unto me, Out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land. 15 For, lo, I will call all the families of the kingdoms of the north, saith the LORD; and they shall come, and they shall set every one his throne at the entering of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all the walls thereof round about, and against all the cities of Judah. 16 And I will utter my judgments against them touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands. 17 Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them. 18 For, behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. 19 And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the LORD, to deliver thee.

Here, I. God gives Jeremiah, in vision, a view of the principal errand he was to go upon, which was to foretel the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, for their sins, especially their idolatry. This was at first represented to him in a way proper to make an impression upon him, that he might have it upon his heart in all his dealings with this people.

1. He intimates to him that the people were ripening apace for ruin and that ruin was hastening apace towards them. God, having answered his objection, that he was a child, goes on to initiate him in the prophetic learning and language; and, having

promised to enable him to speak intelligibly to the people, he here teaches him to understand what God says to him; for prophets must have eyes in their heads as well as tongues, must be seers as well as speakers. He therefore asks him, "*Jeremiah, what seest thou?*" Look about thee, and observe now." And he was soon aware of what was presented to him: "*I see a rod*, denoting affliction and chastisement, a correcting rod hanging over us; and it is a *rod of an almond-tree*, which is one of the forwardest trees in the spring, is in the bud and blossom quickly, when other trees are scarcely broken out;" it flourishes, says Pliny, in the month of January, and by March has ripe fruits; hence it is called in the Hebrew, *Shakedh*, the *hasty tree*. Whether this rod that Jeremiah saw had already budded, as some think, or whether it was stripped and dry, as others think, and yet Jeremiah knew it to be of an almond-tree, as Aaron's rod was, is uncertain; but God explained it in the next words (v. 12): *Thou hast well seen*. God commended him that he was so observant, and so quick of apprehension, as to be aware, though it was the first vision he ever saw, that it was a *rod of an almond-tree*, that his mind was so composed as to be able to distinguish. Prophets have need of good eyes; and those that see well shall be commended, and not those only that speak well. "Thou hast seen a *hasty tree*, which signifies that *I will hasten my word to perform it*." Jeremiah shall prophesy that which he himself shall live to see accomplished. We have the explication of this, Ezek. vii. 10, 11, "*The rod hath blossomed, pride hath budded, violence has risen up into a rod of wickedness*. The measure of Jerusalem's iniquity fills very fast; and, as if their destruction slumbered too long, they waken it, they hasten it, and I will hasten to perform what I have spoken against them."

2. He intimates to him whence the intended ruin should arise. Jeremiah is a second time asked: *What seest thou?* and he sees a *seething-pot* upon the fire (v. 13), representing Jerusalem and Judah in great commotion, like boiling water, by reason of the descent which the Chaldean army made upon them; made *like a fiery oven* (Ps. xxi. 9), all in a heat, wasting away as boiling water does and sensibly evaporating and growing less and less, ready to boil over, to be thrown out of their own city and land, as out of the pan into the fire, from bad to worse. Some think that those scoffers referred to this who said (Ezek. xi. 3), *This city is the cauldron, and we are the flesh*. Now the mouth or face of the furnace or hearth, over which this pot boiled, was *towards the north*, for thence the fire and the fuel were to come that must *make the pot boil thus*. So the vision is explained (v. 14): *Out of the north an evil shall break forth, or shall be opened*. It had been long designed by the



justice of God, and long deserved by the sin of the people, and yet hitherto the divine patience had restrained it; and held it in, as it were; the enemies had intended it, and God had checked them; but now all restraints shall be taken off, and the *evil shall break forth*; the direful scene shall open, and the enemy shall come in like a flood. It shall be a universal calamity; it shall come upon all the inhabitants of the land, from the highest to the lowest, for they have all corrupted their way. Look for this storm to arise out of the north, whence fair weather usually comes, Job xxxvii. 22. When there was friendship between Hezekiah and the king of Babylon they promised themselves many advantages out of the north; but it proved quite otherwise: out of the north their trouble arose. Thence sometimes the fiercest tempests come whence we expected fair weather. This is further explained v. 15, where we may observe, (1.) The raising of the army that shall invade Judah and lay it waste: *I will call all the families of the kingdoms of the north, saith the Lord*. All the northern crowns shall unite under Nebuchadnezzar, and join with him in this expedition. They lie dispersed, but God, who has all men's hearts in his hand, will bring them together; they lie at a distance from Judah, but God, who directs all men's steps, will call them, and they shall come, though they be ever so far off. God's summons shall be obeyed; those whom he calls shall come. When he has work to do of any kind he will find instruments to do it, though he send to the utmost parts of the earth for them. And, that the armies brought into the field may be sufficiently numerous and strong, he will call not only the kingdoms of the north, but all the families of those kingdoms, into the service; not one able-bodied man shall be left behind. (2.) The advance of this army. The commanders of the troops of the several nations shall take their post in carrying on the siege of Jerusalem and the other cities of Judah. They shall set every one his throne, or seat. When a city is besieged we say, The enemy sits down before it. They shall encamp some at the entering of the gates, others against the walls round about, to cut off both the going out of the mouths and the coming in of the meat, and so to starve them.

3. He tells him plainly what was the procuring cause of all these judgments; it was the sin of Jerusalem and of the cities of Judah (v. 16): *I will pass sentence upon them* (so it may be read) *or give judgment against them* (this sentence, this judgment) *because of all their wickedness*; it is this that plucks up the flood-gates and lets in this inundation of calamities. They have forsaken God and revolted from their allegiance to him, and have burnt incense to other gods, new gods, strange gods, and all false gods, pretenders, usurpers, the creatures of their own

fancy, and they have worshipped the works of their own hands. Jeremiah was young, had looked but little abroad into the world, and perhaps did not know, nor could have believed, what abominable idolatries the children of his people were guilty of; but God tells him, that he might know what to level his reproofs against and what to ground his threatenings upon, and that he might himself be satisfied in the equity of the sentence which in God's name he was to pass upon them.

II. God excites and encourages Jeremiah to apply himself with all diligence and seriousness to his business. A great trust is committed to him. He is sent in God's name as a herald at arms, to proclaim war against his rebellious subjects; for God is pleased to give warning of his judgments beforehand, that sinners may be awakened to meet him by repentance, and so turn away his wrath, and that, if they do not, they may be left inexcusable. With this trust Jeremiah has a charge given him (v. 17): *"Thou, therefore, gird up thy loins*; free thyself from all those things that would unfit thee for or hinder thee in this service; buckle to it with readiness and resolution, and be not entangled with doubts about it. He must be quick: *Arise*, and lose no time. He must be busy: *Arise, and speak unto them* in season, out of season. He must be bold: *Be not dismayed at their faces*, as before, v. 8. In a word, he must be faithful; it is required of ambassadors that they be so.

1. In two things he must be faithful:—(1.) He must speak all that he is charged with: *Speak all that I command thee*. He must forget nothing as minute, or foreign, or not worth mentioning; every word of God is weighty. He must conceal nothing for fear of offending; he must alter nothing under pretence of making it more fashionable or more palatable, but, without addition or diminution, declare the whole counsel of God. (2.) He must speak to all that he is charged against; he must not whisper it in a corner to a few particular friends that will take it well, but he must appear against the kings of Judah, if they be wicked kings, and bear his testimony against the sins even of the princes thereof; for the greatest of men are not exempt from the judgments either of God's hand or of his mouth. Nay, he must not spare the priests thereof; though he himself was a priest, and was concerned to maintain the dignity of his order, yet he must not therefore flatter them in their sins. He must appear against the people of the land, though they were his own people, as far as they were against the Lord.

2. Two reasons are here given why he should do thus:—(1.) Because he had reason to fear the wrath of God if he should be false: *"Be not dismayed at their faces*, so as to desert thy office, or shrink from the duty of it, lest I confound and dismay thee before them, lest I give thee up to thy faint-



heartedness." Those that consult their own credit, ease, and safety, more than their work and duty, are justly left of God to themselves, and to bring upon themselves the shame of their own cowardliness. Nay, *lest I reckon with thee for thy faint-heartedness, and break thee to pieces*; so some read it. Therefore this prophet says (*ch. xvii. 17*), *Lord, be not thou a terror to me*. Note, The fear of God is the best antidote against the fear of man. Let us always be afraid of offending God, who after he has killed has power to cast into hell, and then we shall be in little danger of fearing the faces of men that can but kill the body, *Luke xii. 4, 5*. See *Neh. iv. 14*. It is better to have all the men in the world our enemies than God our enemy. (2.) Because he had no reason to fear the wrath of men if he were faithful; for the God whom he served would protect him, and bear him out, so that they should neither sink his spirits nor drive him off from his work, should neither stop his mouth nor take away his life, till he had finished his testimony, *v. 18*. This young stripling of a prophet is made by the power of God as an impregnable city, fortified with iron pillars and surrounded with walls of brass; he sallies out upon the enemy in reproofs and threatenings, and *keeps them in awe*. They set upon him on every side; the kings and princes batter him with their power, the priests thunder against him with their church-censures, and *the people of the land* shoot their arrows at him, even slanderous and bitter words; but he shall keep his ground and make his part good with them; he shall still be a curb upon them (*v. 19*): *They shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail to destroy thee, for I am with thee to deliver thee* out of their hands; nor shall they prevail to defeat the word that God sends them by Jeremiah, nor to deliver themselves; it shall take hold of them, for God is against them to destroy them. Note, Those who are sure that they have God with them (as he is if they be with him) need not, ought not, to be afraid, whoever is against them.

## CHAP. II.

It is probable that this chapter was Jeremiah's first sermon after his ordination; and a most lively pathetic sermon it is as any we have in all the books of the prophets. Let him not say, "I cannot speak, for I am a child;" for, God having touched his mouth and put his words into it, none can speak better. The scope of the chapter is to show God's people their transgressions, even the house of Jacob their sins; it is all by way of reproof and conviction, that they might be brought to repent of their sins and so prevent the ruin that was coming upon them. The charge drawn up against them is very high, the aggravations are black, the arguments used for their conviction very close and pressing, and the expostulations very pungent and affecting. The sin which they are most particularly charged with here is idolatry, forsaking the true God, their own God, for other false gods. Now they are told, I. That this was ungrateful to God, who had been so kind to them, *ver. 1-8*. II. That it was without precedent, that a nation should change their god, *ver. 9-13*. III. That hereby they had disparaged and ruined themselves, *ver. 14-19*. IV. That they had broken their covenants and degenerated from their good beginnings, *ver. 20, 21*. V. That their wickedness was too plain to be concealed and too bad to be excused, *ver. 22, 23, 35*. VI. That they persisted wilfully and obstinately in it, and were irreclaimable and indefatigable in their idolatries, *ver. 24, 25, 33, 36*. VII. That they shamed themselves by their idolatry and should shortly be made ashamed of it when they should find their idols

unable to help them, *ver. 28-29, 37*. VIII. That they had not been convinced and reformed by the rebukes of Providence they had been under, *ver. 30*. IX. That they had put a great contempt upon God, *ver. 31, 32*. X. That with their idolatries they had mixed the most unnatural murders, shedding the blood of the poor innocents, *ver. 34*. Those hearts were hard indeed that were untouched and unhumiliated when their sins were thus set in order before them. O that by meditating on this chapter we might be brought to repent of our spiritual idolatries, giving that place in our souls to the world and the flesh which should have been reserved for God only!

**M**OREOVER the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 2 Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. 3 Israel was holiness unto the LORD, and the first-fruits of his increase: all that devour him shall offend; evil shall come upon them, saith the LORD. 4 Hear ye the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel: 5 Thus saith the LORD, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain? 6 Neither said they, Where is the LORD that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, that led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought, and of the shadow of death, through a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt? 7 And I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof; but when ye entered, ye defiled my land, and made mine heritage an abomination. 8 The priests said not, Where is the LORD? And they that handle the law knew me not: the pastors also transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit.

Here is, I. A command given to Jeremiah to go and carry a message from God to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. He was charged in general (*ch. i. 17*) to go and speak to them; here he is particularly charged to go and speak this to them. Note, It is good for ministers by faith and prayer to take out a fresh commission when they address themselves solemnly to any part of their work. Let a minister carefully compare what he has to deliver with the word of God, and see that it agrees with it, that he may be able to say, not only, *The Lord sent me*, but, *He sent*



me to *speaking this*. He must go from Anathoth, where he lived in a pleasant retirement, spending his time (it is likely) among a few friends and in the study of the law, and must make his appearance at Jerusalem, that noisy tumultuous city, and *cry in their ears*, as a man in earnest and that would be heard: "Cry aloud, that all may hear, and none may plead ignorance. Go close to them, and *cry in the ears* of those that have stopped their ears."

II. The message he was commanded to deliver. He must upbraid them with their horrid ingratitude in forsaking a God who had been of old so kind to them, that this might either make them ashamed and bring them to repentance, or might justify God in turning his hand against them.

1. God here puts them in mind of the favours he had of old bestowed upon them, when they were first formed into a people (v. 2): "*I remember for thy sake*, and I would have thee to remember it, and improve the remembrance of it for thy good; I cannot forget *the kindness of thy youth and the love of thy espousals*."

(1.) This may be understood of the kindness they had for God; it was not such indeed as they had any reason to boast of, or to plead with God for favour to be shown them (for many of them were very unkind and provoking, and, when they did return and enquire early after God, they did but flatter him), yet God is pleased to mention it, and plead it with them; for, though it was but little love that they showed him, he took it kindly. When they believed the Lord and his servant Moses, when they sang God's praise at the Red Sea, when at the foot of Mount Sinai they promised, *All that the Lord shall say unto us we will do and will be obedient*, then was the kindness of their youth and the love of their espousals. When they seemed so forward for God he said, *Surely they are my people*, and will be faithful to me, *children that will not lie*. Note, Those that begin well and promise fair, but do not perform and persevere, will justly be upbraided with their hopeful and promising beginnings. God remembers the kindness of our youth and the love of our espousals, the zeal we then seemed to have for him and the affection wherewith we made our covenants with him, the buds and blossoms that never came to perfection; and it is good for us to remember them, that we may remember whence we have fallen, and return to our first love, Rev. ii. 4, 5; Gal. iv. 15. In two things appeared the kindness of their youth: —[1.] That they followed the direction of the pillar of cloud and fire in the wilderness; and though sometimes they spoke of returning into Egypt, or pushing forward into Canaan, yet they did neither, but for forty years together *went after God in the wilderness*, and trusted him to provide for them, though it was a land that was not sown.

This God took kindly, and took notice of it to their praise long after, that, though much was amiss among them, yet they never forsook the guidance they were under. Thus, though Christ often chid his disciples, yet he commended them, at parting, for continuing with him, Luke xxii. 28. It must be the strong affection of the youth, and the espousals, that will carry us on to follow God in a wilderness, with an implicit faith and an entire resignation; and it is a pity that those who have so followed him should ever leave him. [2.] That they entertained divine institutions, set up the tabernacle among them, and attended the service of it. *Israel was then holiness to the Lord*; they joined themselves to him in covenant as a peculiar people. Thus they began in the spirit, and God puts them in mind of it, that they might be ashamed of ending in the flesh.

(2.) Or it may be understood of God's kindness to them; of that he afterwards speaks largely. When Israel was a child, then I loved him, Hos. xi. 1. He then espoused that people to himself with all the affection with which a young man marries a virgin (Isaiah lxii. 5), for the time was a time of love, Ezek. xvi. 8. [1.] God appropriated them to himself. Though they were a sinful people, yet, by virtue of the covenant made with them and the church set up among them, they were *holiness to the Lord*, dedicated to his honour and taken under his special tuition; they were the *first-fruits of his increase*, the first constituted church he had in the world; they were the first-fruits, but the full harvest was to be gathered from among the Gentiles. The *first-fruits of the increase* were God's part of it, were offered to him, and he was honoured with them; so were the people of the Jews; what little tribute, rent, and homage, God had from the world, he had it chiefly from them; and it was their honour to be thus set apart for God. This honour have all the saints; they are the *first-fruits of his creatures*, Jam. i. 18. [2.] Having espoused them, he espoused their cause, and became an *enemy to their enemies*, Exod. xxiii. 22. Being the *first-fruits of his increase*, all that devoured him (so it should be read) *did offend*; they trespassed, they contracted guilt, and evil befel them, as those were reckoned *offenders that devoured the first-fruits*, or any thing else that was *holy to the Lord*, that embezzled them, or converted them to their own use, Lev. v. 15. Whoever offered any injury to the people of God did so at their peril; their God was ready to avenge their quarrel, and said to the proudest of kings, *Touch not my anointed*, Ps. cv. 14, 15; Exod. xvii. 14. He had in a special manner a controversy with those that attempted to debauch them and draw them off from being *holiness to the Lord*; witness his quarrel with the Midianites about the matter of Peor, Num. xxv. 17, 18.

[3.] He brought them out of Egypt with a high hand and great terror (Deut. iv. 34), and yet with a kind hand and great tenderness led them through a vast howling wilderness (v. 6), a land of deserts and pits, or of graves, *terram sepulchralem*—a sepulchral land, where there was ground, not to feed them, but to bury them, where there was no good to be expected, for it was a land of drought, but all manner of evil to be feared, for it was the shadow of death. In that darksome valley they walked forty years; but God was with them; his rod, in Moses's hand, and his staff, comforted them, and even there God prepared a table for them (Ps. xxiii. 4, 5), gave them bread out of the clouds and drink out of the rocks. It was a land abandoned by all mankind, as yielding neither road nor rest. It was no thoroughfare, for no man passed through it—no settlement, for no man dwelt there. For God will teach his people to tread untrodden paths, to dwell alone, and to be singular. The difficulties of the journey are thus insisted on, to magnify the power and goodness of God in bringing them, through all, safely to their journey's end at last. All God's spiritual Israel must own their obligations to him for a safe conduct through the wilderness of this world, no less dangerous to the soul than that was to the body. [4.] At length he settled them in Canaan (v. 7): I brought you into a plentiful country, which would be the more acceptable after they had been for so many years in a land of drought. They did eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof, and were allowed so to do. I brought you into a land of Carmel (so the word is); Carmel was a place of extraordinary fruitfulness, and Canaan was as one great fruitful field, Deut. viii. 7. [5.] God gave them the means of knowledge and grace, and communion with him; this is implied, v. 8. They had priests that handled the law, read it, and expounded it to them; that was part of their business, Deut. xxxiii. 8. They had pastors, to guide them and take care of their affairs, magistrates and judges; they had prophets to consult God for them and to make known his mind to them.

2. He upbraids them with their horrid ingratitude, and the ill returns they had made him for these favours; let them all come and answer to this charge (v. 4); it is exhibited in the name of God against all the families of the house of Israel, for they can none of them plead, *Not guilty*. (1.) He challenges them to produce any instance of his being unjust and unkind to them. Though he had conferred favours upon them in some things, yet, if in other things he had dealt hardly with them, they would not have been altogether without excuse. He therefore puts it fairly to them to show cause for their deserting him (v. 5): "What iniquity have your fathers found in me, or you either? Have you, upon trial, found God a hard

master? Have his commands put any hardship upon you or obliged you to any thing unfit, unfair, or unbecoming you? Have his promises put any cheats upon you, or raised your expectations of things which you were afterwards disappointed of? You that have renounced your covenant with God, can you say that it was a hard bargain and that which you could not live upon? You that have forsaken the ordinances of God, can you say that it was because they were a wearisome service, or work that there was nothing to be got by? No; the disappointments you have met with were owing to yourselves, not to God. The yoke of his commandments is easy, and in the keeping of them there is great reward." Note, Those that forsake God cannot say that he has ever given them any provocation to do so: for this we may safely appeal to the consciences of sinners; the slothful servant that offered such a plea as this had it overruled out of his own mouth, Luke xix. 22. Though he afflicts us, we cannot say that there is iniquity in him; he does us no wrong. The ways of the Lord are undoubtedly equal; all the iniquity is in our ways. (2.) He charges them with being very unjust and unkind to him notwithstanding. [1.] They had quitted his service: "They have gone from me, nay, they have gone far from me." They studied how to estrange themselves from God and their duty, and got as far as they could out of the reach of his commandments and their own convictions. Those that have deserted religion commonly set themselves at a greater distance from it, and in a greater opposition to it, than those that never knew it. [2.] They had quitted it for the service of idols, which was so much the greater reproach to God and his service; they went from him, not to better themselves, but to cheat themselves: *They have walked after vanity*, that is, idolatry; for an idol is a vain thing; it is nothing in the world, 1 Cor. viii. 4; Deut. xxxii. 21; Jer. xiv. 22. Idolatrous worship is vanities, Acts xiv. 15. Idolaters are vain, for those that make idols are like unto them (Ps. cxv. 8), as much stocks and stones as the images they worship, and good for as little. [3.] They had with idolatry introduced all manner of wickedness. When they entered into the good land which God gave them they defiled it (v. 7), by defiling themselves and disfitting themselves for the service of God. It was God's land; they were but tenants to him, sojourners in it, Lev. xxv. 23. It was his heritage, for it was a holy land, Immanuel's land; but they made it an abomination, even to God himself, who was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel. [4.] Having forsaken God, though they soon found that they had changed for the worse, yet they had no thoughts of returning to him again, nor took any steps towards it. Neither the people nor the priests made any enquiry after him, took any thought



about their duty to him, nor expressed any desire to recover his favour. *First*, The people said not, *Where is the Lord?* v. 6. Though they were trained up in an observance of him as their God, and had been often told that he *brought them out of the land of Egypt*, to be a people peculiar to himself, yet they never asked after him nor desired the knowledge of his ways. *Secondly*, The priests said not, *Where is the Lord?* v. 8. Those whose office it was to attend immediately upon him were in no concern to acquaint themselves with him, or approve themselves to him. Those who should have instructed the people in the knowledge of God took no care to get the knowledge of him themselves. The scribes, who *handled the law*, did not know God nor his will, could not expound the scriptures at all, or not aright. The pastors, who should have kept the flock from transgressing, were themselves ringleaders in transgression: *They have transgressed against me*. The pretenders to prophecy prophesied by Baal, in his name, to his honour, being backed and supported by the wicked kings to confront the Lord's prophets. Baal's prophets joined with Baal's priests, and walked after the things which do not profit, that is, after the idols which can be no way helpful to their worshippers. See how the best characters are usurped, and the best offices liable to corruption; and wonder not at the sin and ruin of a people when the *blind are leaders of the blind*.

9 Wherefore I will yet plead with you, saith the LORD, and with your children's children will I plead. 10 For pass over the isles of Chittim, and see; and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing. 11 Hath a nation changed *their* gods, which *are* yet no gods? But my people have changed their glory for *that which* doth not profit. 12 Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD. 13 For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, *and* hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.

The prophet, having shown their base ingratitude in forsaking God, here shows their unparalleled fickleness and folly (v. 9): *I will yet plead with you*. Note, Before God punishes sinners he pleads with them, to bring them to repentance. Note, further, When much has been said of the evil of sin, still there is more to be said; when one article of the charge is made good, there is another to be urged; when we have said a great deal,

still we have yet to speak on God's behalf, Job xxxvi. 2. Those that deal with sinners, for their conviction, must urge a variety of arguments and follow their blow. God had before pleaded with their fathers, and asked why they walked after vanity and became vain, v. 5. Now he pleads with those who persisted in that *vain conversation received by tradition from their fathers*, and with their children's children, that is, with all that in every age tread in their steps. Let those that forsake God know that he is willing to argue the case fairly with them, that he may be justified when he speaks. He pleads that with us which we should plead with ourselves.

I. He shows that they acted contrary to the usage of all nations. Their neighbours were more firm and faithful to their false gods than they were to the true God. They were ambitious of being like the nations, and yet in this they were unlike them. He challenges them to produce an instance of any nation that had *changed their gods* (v. 10, 11) or were apt to change them. Let them survey either the old records or the present state of the isles of Chittim, Greece, and the European islands, the countries that were more polite and learned, and of Kedar, that lay south-east (as the other north-west from them), which were more rude and barbarous; and they should not find an instance of a nation that had *changed their gods*, though they had never done them any kindness, nor could do, for *they were no gods*. Such a veneration had they for their gods, so good an opinion of them, and such a respect for the choice their fathers had made, that though they were gods of wood and stone they would not change them for gods of silver and gold, no, not for the living and true God. *Shall we praise them for this? We praise them not*. But it may well be urged, to the reproach of Israel, that they, who were the only people that had no cause to change their God, were yet the only people that had changed him. Note, Men are with difficulty brought off from that religion which they have been brought up in, though ever so absurd and grossly false. The zeal and constancy of idolaters should shame Christians out of their coldness and inconstancy.

II. He shows that they acted contrary to the dictates of common sense, in that they not only changed (it may sometimes be our duty and wisdom to do so), but that they changed for the worse, and made a bad bargain for themselves. 1. They parted from a God who was their glory, who made them truly glorious and every way put honour upon them, one whom they might with a humble confidence glory in as theirs, who is himself a glorious God and the glory of those whose God he is; he was particularly the glory of his people Israel, for his glory had often appeared on their tabernacle. 2. They closed with gods that could do them no good, gods that *do not profit* their worshippers.

Idolaters change God's glory into shame (Rom. i. 23) and so they do their own; in dishonouring him, they disgrace and disparage themselves, and are enemies to their own interest. Note, Whatever those turn to who forsake God, it will never do them any good; it will flatter them and please them, but it *cannot profit them*. Heaven itself is here called upon to stand amazed at the sin and folly of these apostates from God (v. 12, 13): *Be astonished, O you heavens! at this*. The earth is so universally corrupt that it will take no notice of it; but let the heavens and heavenly bodies be astonished at it. Let the sun blush to see such ingratitude and be afraid to shine upon such ungrateful wretches. Those that forsook God worshipped the *host of heaven*, the sun, moon, and stars; but these, instead of being pleased with the adorations that were paid to them, were *astonished and horribly afraid*; and would rather have been *very desolate, utterly exhausted* (as the word is) and deprived of their light, than that it should have given occasion to any to worship them. Some refer it to the *angels of heaven*; if they rejoice at the return of souls to God, we may suppose that they are astonished and horribly afraid at the revolt of souls from him. The meaning is that the conduct of this people towards God was, (1.) Such as we may well be astonished and wonder at, that ever men, who pretend to reason, should do a thing so very absurd. (2.) Such as we ought to have a holy indignation at as impious, and a high affront to our Maker, whose honour every good man is jealous for. (3.) Such as we may tremble to think of the consequences of. What will be in the end hereof? Be horribly afraid to think of the wrath and curse which will be the portion of those who thus throw themselves out of God's grace and favour. Now what is it that is to be thought of with all this horror? It is this: "*My people, whom I have taught and should have ruled, have committed two great evils, ingratitude and folly; they have acted contrary both to their duty and to their interest.*" [1.] They have *affronted their God*, by turning their back upon him, as if he were not worthy their notice: "*They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters*, in whom they have an abundant and constant supply of all the comfort and relief they stand in need of, and have it freely." God is their *fountain of life*. Ps. xxxvi. 9. There is in him an all-sufficiency of grace and strength; all our springs are in him and our streams from him; to forsake him is, in effect, to deny this. He has been to us a bountiful benefactor, a *fountain of living waters*, overflowing, ever-flowing, in the gifts of his favour; to forsake him is to refuse to acknowledge his kindness and to withhold that tribute of love and praise which his kindness calls for. [2.] They have cheated themselves. They forsook *their own mercies*, but it was for

lying vanities. They took a great deal of pains to *hew themselves out cisterns*, to dig pits or pools in the earth or rock which they would carry water to, or which should receive the rain; but they proved *broken cisterns*, false at the bottom, so that they could *hold no water*. When they came to quench their thirst there they found nothing but mud and mire, and the filthy sediments of a standing lake. Such idols were to their worshippers, and such a change did those experience who turned from God to them. If we make an idol of any creature—wealth, or pleasure, or honour,—if we place our happiness in it, and promise ourselves the comfort and satisfaction in it which are to be had in God only,—if we make it our joy and love, our hope and confidence, we shall find it a cistern, which we take a great deal of pains to hew out and fill, and at the best it will hold but a little water, and that dead and flat, and soon corrupting and becoming nauseous. Nay, it is a broken cistern, that cracks and cleaves in hot weather, so that the water is lost when we have most need of it, Job vi. 15. Let us therefore with purpose of heart cleave to the Lord only, for whither else shall we go? He has the words of *eternal life*.

14 *Is Israel a servant? Is he a home-born slave?* Why is he spoiled?

15 The young lions roared upon him, and yelled, and they made his land waste: his cities are burned without inhabitant. 16 Also the children of Noph and Tahapanes have broken the crown of thy head. 17 Hast thou not procured this unto thyself, in that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, when he led thee by the way? 18 And now what hast thou to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor? Or what hast thou to do in the way of Assyria, to drink the waters of the river? 19 Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that *it is* an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, and that my fear *is* not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts.

The prophet, further to evince the folly of their forsaking God, shows them what mischiefs they had already brought upon themselves by so doing; it had already cost them dear, for to this were owing all the calamities their country was now groaning under, which were but an earnest of more and greater if they repented not. See how they smarted for their folly.

1. Their neighbours, who were their pro-



fessed enemies, prevailed against them, and this was owing to their sin. 1. They were enslaved and lost their liberty (v. 14): *Is Israel a servant?* No; *Israel is my son, my first-born*, Exod. iv. 22. They are children; they are heirs. Nay, their extraction is noble; they are the seed of Abraham, God's friend, and of Jacob his chosen. *Is he a home-born slave?* No; he is not the son of the bond-woman, but of the free. They were designed for dominion, not for servitude. Every thing in their constitution carried about it the marks of freedom and honour. *Why then is he spoiled of his liberty?* Why is he used as a servant, as a home-born slave? Why does he *make himself a slave* to his lusts, to his idols, to that which does not profit? v. 11. What a thing is this, that such a birthright should be sold for a mess of pottage, such a crown profaned and laid in the dust! Why is he made a slave to the oppressor? God provided that a Hebrew servant should be free the seventh year, and that their slaves should be of the heathen, not of their brethren, Lev. xxv. 44, 46. But, notwithstanding this, the princes made slaves of their subjects, and masters made slaves of their servants (ch. xxxiv. 11), and so made their country mean and miserable, which God had made happy and honourable. The neighbouring princes and powers broke in upon them, and made some of them slaves even in their own country, and perhaps sold others for slaves into foreign countries. And how came they thus to lose their liberties? For *their iniquities they sold themselves*, Isa. l. 1. We may apply this spiritually. Is the soul of man a servant? *Is it a home-born slave?* No, it is not. Why then is it spoiled? It is because it has sold its own liberty and enslaved itself to divers lusts and passions, which is a lamentation, and should be for a lamentation. 2. They were impoverished and had lost their wealth. God brought them into a plentiful country (v. 7), but all their neighbours made a prey of it (v. 15): *Young lions roar aloud over him and yell*; they are a continual terror to him. Sometimes one potent enemy, and sometimes another, and sometimes many in confederacy, fall upon him, and triumph over him. They carry off the fruits of his land, and make that waste, and burn his cities, when first they have plundered them, so that they remain without inhabitant, either because there are no houses to dwell in or because those that should dwell in them are carried into captivity. 3. They were abused, and insulted over, and beaten by every body (v. 16): "Even the children of Noph and Tahapanes, despicable people, not famed for military courage nor strength, have broken the crown of thy head, or fed upon it. In all their struggles with thee they have been too hard for thee, and thou hast always come off with a broken head. The principal part of thy country, that which lay next Jerusalem, has

been and is a prey to them." How calamitous the condition of Judah had been of late in the reign of Manasseh we find, 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11, and perhaps it had not now much recovered itself. 4. All this was owing to their sin (v. 17): *Hast thou not procured this unto thyself?* By their sinful confederacies with the nations, and especially their conformity to them in their idolatrous customs and usages, they had made themselves very mean and contemptible, as all those do that have made a profession of religion and afterwards throw it off. Nothing now appeared of that which, by their constitution, made them both honourable and formidable, and therefore nobody either respected them or feared them. But this was not all; they had provoked God to give them up into the hands of their enemies, and to make them a scourge to them and give them success against them; and "thus thou hast procured it to thyself, in that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, revolted from thy allegiance to him and so thrown thyself out of his protection; for protection and allegiance go together." Whatever trouble we are in at any time we may thank ourselves for it; for we bring it upon our own head by our forsaking God: "Thou hast forsaken thy God at the time that he was leading thee by the way" (so it should be read); "then when he was leading thee on to a happy peace and settlement, and thou wast within a step of it, then thou forsookest him, and so didst put a bar in thy own door."

II. Their neighbours, that were their pretended friends, deceived them, distressed them, and helped them not, and this also was owing to their sin. 1. They did in vain seek to Egypt and Assyria for help (v. 18): "What hast thou to do in the way of Egypt? When thou art under apprehensions of danger thou art running to Egypt for help, Isa. xxx. 1, 2; xxxi. 1. Thou art for drinking the waters of Sihor," that is, Nilus. "Thou reliest upon their multitude, and refreshest thyself with the fair promises they make thee. At other times thou art in the way of Assyria, sending or going with all speed to fetch recruits thence, and thinkest to satisfy thyself with the waters of the river Euphrates; what hast thou to do there? What wilt thou get by applying to them? They shall help in vain, shall be broken reeds to thee, and what thou thoughtest would be to thee as a river will be but a broken cistern." 2. This also was because of their sin. The judgment shall unavoidably come upon them which their sin has deserved; and then to what purpose is it to call in help against it? v. 19. "Thy own wickedness shall correct thee, and then it is impossible for them to save thee; know and see therefore, upon the whole matter, that it is an evil thing that thou hast forsaken God, for it is that which makes thy enemies enemies indeed, and thy friends friends in vain." Observe here, (1.) The nature of sin; it is forsaking



the Lord as our God; it is the soul's alienation from him and aversion to him. Cleaving to sin is leaving God. (2.) The cause of sin; it is because *his fear is not in us*. It is for want of a good principle in us, particularly for want of the fear of God; this is at the bottom of our apostasy from him; men forsake their duty to God because they stand in no awe of him nor have any dread of his displeasure. (3.) The malignity of sin; it is *an evil thing and a bitter*. Sin is an evil thing, only evil, an evil that has no good in it, an evil that is the root and cause of all other evil; it is evil indeed, for it is not only the greatest contrariety to the divine nature, but the greatest corruption of the human nature. It is *bitter*; a state of sin is the *gall of bitterness*, and every sinful way will be *bitterness in the latter end*; the wages of it is death, and death is bitter. (4.) The fatal consequences of sin; as it is in itself evil and bitter, so it has a direct tendency to make us miserable: "*Thy own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee*, not only destroy and ruin thee hereafter, but correct and reprove thee now; they will certainly bring trouble upon thee; the punishment will so inevitably follow the sin that the sin shall itself be said to punish thee. Nay, the punishment, in its kind and circumstances, shall so directly answer to the sin, that thou mayest read the sin in the punishment; and the justice of the punishment shall be so plain that thou shalt not have a word to say for thyself; thy own wickedness shall convince thee and stop thy mouth for ever and thou shalt be forced to own that *the Lord is righteous*." (5.) The use and application of all this: "*Know therefore, and see it, and repent of thy sin, that so the iniquity which is thy correction may not be thy ruin*."

20 For of old time I have broken thy yoke, *and* burst thy bands; and thou saidst, I will not transgress; when upon every high hill and under every green tree thou wanderest, playing the harlot. 21 Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me? 22 For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, *yet* thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord God. 23 How canst thou say, I am not polluted, I have not gone after Baalim? See thy way in the valley, know what thou hast done: *thou art* a swift dromedary traversing her ways; 24 A wild ass used to the wilderness, *that* snuffeth up the wind at her pleasure; in her

occasion who can turn her away? All they that seek her will not weary themselves; in her month they shall find her. 25 Withhold thy foot from being unshod, and thy throat from thirst: but thou saidst, There is no hope: no; for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go. 26 As the thief is ashamed when he is found, so is the house of Israel ashamed; they, their kings, their princes, and their priests, and their prophets, 27 Saying to a stock, Thou *art* my father; and to a stone, Thou hast brought me forth: for they have turned *their* back unto me, and not *their* face: but in the time of their trouble they will say, Arise, and save us. 28 But where *are* thy gods that thou hast made thee? Let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble: for *according* to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah.

In these verses the prophet goes on with his charge against this backsliding people. Observe here,

I. The sin itself that he charges them with—idolatry, that great provocation which they were so notoriously guilty of. 1. They frequented the places of idol-worship (v. 20): "*Upon every high hill and under every green tree*, in the high places and the groves, such as the heathen had a foolish fondness and veneration for, *thou wanderest*, first to one and then to another, like one unsettled, and still uneasy and unsatisfied; but in all *playing the harlot*," worshipping false gods, which is spiritual whoredom, and was commonly accompanied with corporal whoredom too. Note, Those that leave God wander endlessly, and a vagrant lust is insatiable. 2. They made images for themselves, and gave divine honour to them (v. 26, 27); not only the common people, but even the kings and princes, who should have restrained the people from doing ill, and the priests and prophets, who should have taught them to do well, were themselves so wretchedly sottish and stupid, and under the power of such a strong delusion, as to *say to a stock*, "*Thou art my father*" (that is, Thou art my god, the author of my being, to whom I owe duty and on whom I have a dependence)," and *to a stone*, to an idol made of stone, "*Thou hast begotten me, or brought me forth*"; therefore protect me, provide for me, and bring me up." What greater affront could men put upon God, who is our Father that has made us? It was a downright disowning of their obligations to him. What greater affront could men put upon themselves and their own reason than to acknowledge that which



is in itself absurd and impossible, and, by making stocks and stones their parents, to make themselves no better than stocks and stones? When these were first made the objects of worship they were supposed to be animated by some celestial power or spirit; but by degrees the thought of this was lost, and so vain did idolaters become in *their imagination*, even the princes and priests themselves, that the very idol, though made of wood and stone, was supposed to be their father, and adored accordingly. 3. They multiplied these dunghill deities endlessly (v. 28): *According to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah!* When they had forsaken that God who is one, and all-sufficient for all, (1.) They were not satisfied with any gods they had, but still desired more, that idolatry being in this respect of the same nature with covetousness, which is spiritual idolatry (for the more men have the more they would have), which is a plain evidence that what men make an idol of they find to be insufficient and unsatisfying, and that it cannot *make the comers thereunto perfect*. (2.) They could not agree in the same god. Having left the centre of unity, they fell into endless discord; one city fancied one deity and another another, and each was anxious to have one of its own to be near them and to take special care of them. Thus did they in vain seek that in many gods which is to be found in one God only.

II. The proof of this. No witnesses need be called; it is proved by the notorious evidence of the facts. 1. They went about to deny it, and were ready to plead, *Not guilty*. They pretended that they would acquit themselves from this guilt, they *washed themselves with nitre*, and *took much soap*, offered many things in excuse and extenuation of it, v. 22. They pretended that they did not worship these as gods, but as demons, and mediators between the immortal God and mortal men, or that it was not divine honour that they gave them, but civil respect; thus they sought to evade the convictions of God's word and to screen themselves from the dread of his wrath. Nay, some of them had the impudence to deny the thing itself; they said, *I am not polluted, I have not gone after Baalim*, v. 23. Because it was done secretly, and industriously concealed (Ezek. viii. 12), they thought it could never be proved upon them, and they had impudence enough to deny it. In this, as in other things, their way was like that of the adulterous woman, that says, *I have done no wickedness*, Prov. xxx. 20. 2. Notwithstanding all their evasions, they are convicted of it and found guilty: "*How canst thou deny the fact, and say, I have not gone after Baalim? How canst thou deny the fault, and say, I am not polluted?*" The prophet speaks with wonder at their impudence: "*How canst thou put on a face to say so, when it is certain?*" (1.) "God's omniscience is a witness against thee: Thy

*iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord God; it is laid up and hidden, to be produced against thee in the day of judgment, sealed up among his treasures,"* Deut. xxxii. 34; Job xxi. 19; Hos. xiii. 12. "*It is imprinted deeply and stained before me;*" so some read it. "*Though thou endeavour to wash it out, as murderers to get the stain of the blood of the person slain out of their clothes, yet it will never be got out.*" God's eye is upon it, and we are sure that his judgment is according to truth. (2.) "Thy own conscience is a witness against thee. See *thy way in the valley*" (they had worshipped idols, not only on the high hills, but in the valleys, Isa. lvii. 5, 6), in the *valley over-against Beth-peor* (so some), where they worshipped Baal-peor (Deut. xxxiv. 6, Num. xxv. 3), as if the prophet looked as far back as the *iniquity of Peor*; but, if it mean any particular valley, surely it is the *valley of the son of Hinnom*, for that was the place where they sacrificed their children to Moloch and which therefore witnessed against them more than any other: "*look into that valley, and thou canst not but know what thou hast done.*"

III. The aggravations of this sin with which they are charged, which made it exceedingly sinful.

1. God had done great things for them, and yet they revolted from him and rebelled against him (v. 20): *Of old time I have broken thy yoke and burst thy bonds*; this refers to the bringing of them out of the land of Egypt and the house of bondage, which they would not remember (v. 6), but God did; for, when he told them that they should have no other gods before him, he prefixed this as a reason: *I am the Lord thy God that brought thee out of the land of Egypt!* These bonds of theirs which God had loosed should have bound them for ever to him; but they had ungratefully broken the bonds of duty to that God who had broken the bonds of their slavery.

2. They had promised fair, but had not made good their promise: "*Thou saidst, I will not transgress*"; then, when the mercy of thy deliverance was fresh, thou wast so sensible of it that thou wast willing to lay thyself under the most sacred ties to continue faithful to thy God and never to forsake him." Then they said, *Nay, but we will serve the Lord*, Josh. xxiv. 21. How often have we said that we *would not transgress*, we would not offend any more, and yet we have started aside, like a deceitful bow, and repeated and multiplied our transgressions!

3. They had wretchedly degenerated from what they were when God first formed them into a people (v. 21). *I had planted thee a noble vine*. The constitution of their government both in church and state was excellent, their laws were righteous, and all the ordinances instructive and very significant; and a generation of good men there was among them when they first settled in Ca-



naan. *Israel served the Lord*, and kept close to him *all the days of Joshua, and the elders that out-lived Joshua*, Josh. xxiv. 31. They were then *wholly a right seed*, likely to replenish the vineyard they were planted in with choice vines. But it proved otherwise; the very next generation *knew not the Lord, nor the works which he had done* (Judg. ii. 10), and so they were worse and worse till they became *the degenerate plants of a strange vine*. They were now the reverse of what they were at first. Their constitution was quite broken, and there was nothing in them of that good which one might have expected from a people so happily formed, nothing of the purity and piety of their ancestors. *Their vine is as the vine of Sodom*, Deut. xxxii. 32. This may fitly be applied to the nature of man; it was planted by its great author *a noble vine, a right seed* (God made man upright); but it is so universally corrupt that it has become *the degenerate plant of a strange vine, that bears gall and wormwood*, and it is so to God, it is highly distasteful and offensive to him.

4. They were violent and eager in the pursuit of their idolatries, doted on their idols, and were fond of new ones, and they would not be restrained from them either by the word of God or by his providence, so strong was the *impetus* with which they were carried out after this sin. They are here compared to a *swift dromedary traversing her ways*, a female of that species of creatures hunting about for a male (v. 23), and, to the same purport, *a wild ass used to the wilderness* (v. 24), not tamed by labour, and therefore very wanton, *snuffing up the wind at her pleasure* when she comes near the he-ass, and on such an *occasion who can turn her away?* Who can hinder her from that which she lusts after? *Those that seek her then will not weary themselves for her*, for they know it is to no purpose; but will have a little patience till she is big with young, till that month comes which is the last of *the months that she fulfils* (Job xxxix. 2), when she is heavy and unwieldy, and then *they shall find her*, and she cannot out-run them. Note, (1.) Eager lust is a brutish thing, and those that will not be turned away from the gratifying and indulging of it by reason, and conscience, and honour, are to be reckoned as brute-beasts and no better, such as were born, and still are, *like the wild ass's colt*; let them not be looked upon as rational creatures. (2.) Idolatry is strangely intoxicating, and those that are addicted to it will with great difficulty be cured of it. That lust is as headstrong as any. (3.) There are some so violently set upon the prosecution of their lusts that it is to no purpose to attempt to give check to them: those that do so weary themselves in vain. *Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone*. (4.) The time will come when the most fierce will be tamed and the most wanton will be manageable; when dis-

tress and anguish come upon them, then their ears will be open to discipline, that is the month in which you may find them, Ps. cxli. 5, 6.

5. They were obstinate in their sin, and, as they could not be restrained, so they would not be reformed, v. 25. Here is, (1.) Fair warning given them of the ruin that this wicked course of life would certainly bring them to at last, with a caution therefore not to persist in it, but to break off from it. He would certainly bring them into a miserable captivity, when their feet should be unshod, and they should be forced to travel barefoot, and when they would be denied fair water by their oppressors, so that their throat should be dried with thirst; this will be in the end hereof. Those that affect strange gods, and strange ways of worship, will justly be made prisoners to a strange king in a strange land. "Take up in time therefore; thy running after thy idols will run the *shoes off thy feet*, and thy panting after them will bring thy throat to thirst; withhold therefore thy foot from these violent pursuits, and thy throat from these violent desires." One would think that it should effectually check us in the career of sin to consider what it will bring us to at last. (2.) Their rejecting this fair warning. They said to those that would have persuaded them to repent and reform, "*There is no hope; no, never expect to work upon us, or prevail with us to cast away our idols, for we have loved strangers, and after them we will go*; we are resolved we will, and therefore trouble not yourselves nor us any more with your admonitions; it is to no purpose. There is no hope that we should ever break the corrupt habit and disposition we have got, and therefore we may as well yield to it as go about to get the mastery of it." Note, Their case is very miserable who have brought themselves to such a pass that their corruptions triumph over their convictions; they know they should reform, but own they cannot, and therefore resolve they will not. But, as we must not despair of the mercy of God, but believe that sufficient for the pardon of our sins, though ever so heinous, if we repent and sue for that mercy, so neither must we despair of the grace of God, but believe that able to subdue our corruptions, though ever so strong, if we pray for and improve that grace. A man must never say *There is no hope*, as long as he is on this side hell.

6. They had shamed themselves by their sin, in putting confidence in that which would certainly deceive them in the day of their distress, and putting him away that would have helped them, v. 26—28. *As the thief is ashamed* when, notwithstanding all his arts and tricks to conceal his theft, he is found, and brought to punishment, *so are the house of Israel ashamed*, not with a penitent shame for the sin they had been guilty of, but with a penal shame for the



disappointment they met with in that sin. They will be ashamed when they find, (1.) That they are forced to cry to the God whom they had put contempt upon. In their prosperity they had turned the back to God and not the face; they had slighted him, acted as if they had forgotten him, or did what they could to forget him, would not look towards him, but looked another way; they went from him as fast and as far as they could; but in the time of their trouble they will find no satisfaction but in applying to him; then *they will say, Arise, and save us.* Their fathers had many a time taken this shame to themselves (Judg. iii. 9, iv. 3, x. 10), yet they would not be persuaded to cleave to God, that they might come to him in their trouble with the more confidence. (2.) That they have no relief from the gods they have made their court to. They will be ashamed when they perceive that the gods they have made cannot serve them, and that the God who made them will not serve them. To bring them to this shame, if so be they might hereby be brought to repentance, they are here sent to the gods whom they served, Judg. x. 14. They cried to God, *Arise, and save us.* God says of the idols, "*Let them arise, and save thee,* for thou hast no reason to expect that I should. Let them arise, if they can, from the places where they are fixed; let them try whether they can save thee: but thou wilt be ashamed when thou findest that they can do thee no good, for, though thou hadst a god for every city, yet *thy cities are burnt without inhabitant,*" v. 15. Thus it is the folly of sinners to please themselves with that which will certainly be their grief, and pride themselves in that which will certainly be their shame.

29 Wherefore will ye plead with me? Ye all have transgressed against me, saith the LORD. 30 In vain have I smitten your children; they received no correction: your own sword hath devoured your prophets, like a destroying lion. 31 O generation, see ye the word of the LORD. Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? a land of darkness? Wherefore say my people, We are lords; we will come no more unto thee? 32 Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me days without number. 33 Why trimmest thou thy way to seek love? Therefore hast thou also taught the wicked ones thy ways. 34 Also in thy skirts is found the blood of the souls of the poor innocents: I have not found it by secret search, but upon all these. 35 Yet thou sayest, Because I

am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from me. Behold, I will plead with thee, because thou sayest, I have not sinned. 36 Why gaddest thou about so much to change thy way? Thou also shalt be ashamed of Egypt, as thou wast ashamed of Assyria. 37 Yea, thou shalt go forth from him, and thine hands upon thine head: for the LORD hath rejected thy confidences, and thou shalt not prosper in them.

The prophet here goes on in the same strain, aiming to bring a sinful people to repentance, that their destruction might be prevented.

I. He avers the truth of the charge. It was evident beyond contradiction; it was the greatest absurdity imaginable in them to think of denying it (v. 29): "*Wherefore will you plead with me, and put me upon the proof of it, or wherefore will you go about to plead any thing in excuse of the crime or to obtain a mitigation of the sentence?* Your plea will certainly be overruled, and judgment given against you: you know you *have all transgressed*, one as well as another; why then do you *quarrel with me* for contending with you?"

II. He heightens it from the consideration both of their incorrigibleness and of their ingratitude. 1. They had not been wrought upon by the judgments of God which they had been under (v. 30): *In vain have I smitten your children*, that is, the children or people of Judah. They had been under divine rebukes of many kinds. God therein designed to bring them to repentance; but it was *in vain*. They did not answer God's end in afflicting them; their consciences were not awakened, nor their hearts softened and humbled, nor were they driven to seek unto God; *they received no instruction by the correction*, were not made the better by it; and it is a great loss thus to lose an affliction. They *did not receive*, they did not submit to, or comply with, the correction, but their hearts fretted against the Lord, and so they were *smitten in vain*. Even the *children*, the young people, among them (so it may be taken), were *smitten in vain*; they were so soon prejudiced against repentance that they were as untractable as the old ones that had been long *accustomed to do evil*. 2. They had not been wrought upon by the word of God which he had sent them in the mouth of his servants the prophets; nay, they had killed the messengers for the sake of the message: "*Your own sword has devoured your prophets like a destroying lion*; you have put them to death for their faithfulness with as much rage and fury, and with as much greediness and pleasure, as a lion devours his prey. Their prophets, who

were their greatest blessings, were treated by them as if they had been the plagues of their generation, and this was their measure-filling sin, 2 Chron. xxxvi. 16. They *killed their own prophets*, 1 Thess. ii. 15. 3. They had not been wrought upon by the favours God had bestowed upon them (v. 31): "*O generation!*" (he does not call them, as he might, *O faithless and perverse generation! O generation of vipers!* but speaks gently, O you men of this generation!) "*see the word of the Lord*, do not only hear it, but consider it diligently, apply your minds closely to it." As we are bidden to *hear the rod* (Micah vi. 9), for that has its voice, so we are bidden to *see the word*, for that has its visions, its views. It intimates that what is here said is plain and undeniable; you may see it to be very evident; it is written as with a sun-beam, so that he that runs may read it: *Have I been a wilderness to Israel, a land of darkness*. Note, None of those who have had any dealings with God ever had reason to complain of him as a wilderness or a land of darkness. He has blessed us with the fruits of the earth, and therefore we cannot say that he has been a wilderness to us, a dry and barren land, that (as Mr. Gataker expresses it) he has held us to *hard meat*, as cattle fed upon the common. No; his sheep have been led into green pastures. He has also blessed us with the lights of heaven, and has not withheld them, so that we cannot say, He has been to us a land of darkness. He has caused his sun to shine, as well as his rain to fall, upon the evil and unthankful. Or the meaning is, in general, that the service of God has not been to any either an unpleasant or an unprofitable service. God sometimes has led his people *through a wilderness and a land of darkness*, but he himself was then to them all that which they needed; he so fed them with manna, and led them by a pillar of fire, that it was to them a fruitful field and a land of light. The world is, to those who make it their home and their portion, a wilderness and a land of darkness, vanity and vexation of spirit; but those that dwell in God have the *lines fallen to them in pleasant places*. 4. Instead of being wrought upon by these, they had grown intolerably insolent and imperious. They say, *We are lords; we will come no more unto thee*. Now that they had become a potent kingdom, or thought themselves such, they set up for themselves, and shook off their dependence upon God. This is the language of presumptuous sinners, and it is not only very impious and profane, but very unreasonable and foolish. (1.) It is absurd for us who are subjects to say, *We are lords* (that is, rulers) and we will come no more to God to receive commands from him; for, as he is King of old, so he is King for ever, and we can never pretend to be from under his authority. (2.) It is absurd for us who are

beggars to say, *We are lords*, that is, We are rich, and we will come no more to God, to receive favours from him, as if we could live without him and need not be beholden to him. God justly takes it ill when those to whom he has been a bountiful benefactor care not either for hearing from him or speaking to him.

III. He lays the blame of all their wickedness upon their forgetting God (v. 32): *They have forgotten me*; they have industriously banished the thoughts of God out of their minds, jostled those thoughts out with thoughts of their idols, and avoided all those things that would put them in mind of God. 1. Though they were his own people, in covenant with him and professing relation to him, and had the tokens of his presence in the midst of them and of his favour to them, yet they forgot him. 2. They had long neglected him, *days without number*, time out of mind, as we say. They had not for a great while entertained any serious thoughts of him; so that they seem quite to have forgotten him, and resolved never to remember him again. How many days of our lives have passed without suitable remembrance of God! Who can number those empty days? 3. They had not had such a regard and affection to him as young ladies generally have to their fine clothes: *Can a maid forget her ornaments or a bride her attire?* No; their hearts are upon them; they value them so much, and themselves upon them, that they are ever and anon thinking and speaking of them. When they are to appear in public they do not forget any of *their ornaments*, but put every one in its place, as they are described, Isa. iii. 18, &c. And yet *my people have forgotten me*. It is sad that any should be more in love with their fine clothes than with their God, and should rather leave their religion behind them, or part with that, than leave any of their ornaments behind them, or part with them. Is not God our ornament? Is he not a *crown of glory* and a *diadem of beauty* to his people? Did we look upon him to be so, and upon our religion as an *ornament of grace* to our head and *chains about our neck* (Prov. i. 9), we should be as mindful of them as ever any maid was of her ornaments, or a bride of her attire, we should be as careful to preserve them and as fond to appear in them.

IV. He shows them what a bad influence their sins had had upon others. The sins of God's professing people harden and encourage those about them in their evil ways, especially when they appear forward and ringleaders in sin (v. 33): *Why trimmest thou thy way to seek love?* There is an allusion here to the practice of lewd women who strive to recommend themselves by their ogling looks and gay dress, as Jezebel, who *painted her face and tired her head*. Thus had they courted their neighbours into sinful confederacies with them and communion in



their idolatries, and had taught the wicked ones their ways, their ways of mixing God's institutions with their idolatrous customs and usages, which was a great profanation of that which was sacred and made the ways of their idolatry worse than that of others. Those have a great deal to answer for who, by their fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, make wicked ones more wicked than otherwise they would be.

V. He charges them with the guilt of murder added to the guilt of their idolatry (v. 34): *Also in thy skirts is found the blood of the souls, the life-blood of the poor innocents*, which cried to heaven, and for which God was now making inquisition. The reference is to the children that were offered in sacrifice to Moloch; or it may be taken more generally for all the innocent blood which Manasseh shed, and with which he had filled Jerusalem (2 Kings xxi. 16), the righteous blood, especially the blood of the prophets and others that witnessed against their impieties. This blood was found not by secret search, not by digging (so the word is), but upon all these; it was above ground. This intimates that the guilt of this kind which they had contracted was certain and evident, not doubtful or which would bear a dispute; and that it was avowed and barefaced, and which they had not so much sense either of shame or fear as to endeavour to conceal, which was a great aggravation of it.

VI. He overrules their plea of, *Not guilty*. Though this matter be so plain, yet thou sayest, *Because I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from me*; and again, *Thou sayest, I have not sinned* (v. 35); therefore *I will plead with thee*, and will convince thee of thy mistake. Because they deny the charge, and stand upon their own justification, therefore God will join issue with them and plead with them, both by his word and by his rod. Those shall be made to know how much they deceive themselves, 1. Who say that they have not offended God, that they are innocent, though they have been guilty of the grossest enormities. 2. Who expect that God will be reconciled to them though they do not repent and reform. They own that they had been under the tokens of God's anger, but they think that it was causeless, and that they by pleading innocence had proved it to be so, and therefore they conclude that God will immediately let fall his action and *his anger shall be turned from them*. This is very provoking, and God will plead with them, and convince them that his anger is just, for they have sinned, and he will never cease his controversy till they, instead of justifying themselves thus, humble, and judge, and condemn themselves.

VII. He upbraids them with the shameful disappointments they met with, in making creatures their confidence, while they made

God their enemy, v. 36, 37. It was a piece of spiritual idolatry they were often guilty of that they trusted in an arm of flesh and their hearts therein departed from the Lord. Now here he shows them the folly of it. 1. They were restless, and unsatisfied in the choice of their confidences: "*Why gaddest thou about so much to change thy way?*" Doubtless it is because thou meetest not with that in those thou didst confide in which thou promisedst thyself." Those that make God their hope, and walk in a continual dependence upon him, need not gad about to change their way; for their souls may return to him, and repose in him, as their rest: but those that trust in creatures will be perpetually uneasy, like Noah's dove, that found no rest for the sole of her foot. Every thing they trust to fail; them, and then they think to change for the better, but they will be still disappointed. They first trusted to Assyria, and, when that proved a broken reed, they depended upon Egypt, and that proved no better. Creatures being vanity, they will be vexation of spirit to all those that put their confidence in them; they gad about, seeking rest and finding none. 2. They were quite disappointed in the confidences they made choice of; so the prophet tells them they should be: *Thou shalt be ashamed of Egypt*, which thou now trustest in, as formerly thou wast of Assyria, who distressed them and helped them not, 2 Chron. xxviii. 20. The Jews were a peculiar people in their profession of religion, and for that reason none of the neighbouring nations cared for them, nor could heartily love them; and yet the Jews were still courting them, and confiding in them, and were well enough served when deceived by them. See what will come of it (v. 37): *Thou shalt go forth from him*, thy ambassadors or envoys shall return from Egypt re infected—disappointed, and therefore with their hands upon their heads, lamenting the desperate condition of their people. Or, *Thou shalt go forth hence*, that is, into captivity in a strange land, with thy hands upon thy head, holding it because it aches (*ubi dolor ibi digitus—where the pain is the finger will be applied*), or as people ashamed, for Tamar, in the height of her confusion, laid her hand on her head, 2 Sam. xiii. 19. "And Egypt, that thou reliest on, shall not be able to prevent it nor to rescue thee out of captivity." Those that will not lay their hand on their heart in godly sorrow, which works life, shall be made to lay their hand on their head in the sorrow of the world, which works death. And no wonder that Egypt cannot help them, when God will not. If the Lord do not help thee, whence should I? The Egyptians are broken reeds, for the Lord has rejected thy confidences; he will not make use of them for thy relief, will neither so far honour them, nor so far give countenance to thy confidence in them, as to appoint them

to be the instruments of any good to thee, and therefore *thou shalt not prosper in them*; they shall not stand thee in any stead nor give thee any satisfaction. As *there is no counsel or wisdom* that can prevail against the Lord, so there is none that can prevail without him. Some read it, *The Lord has rejected thee for thy confidences*; because thou hast dealt so unfaithfully with him as to trust in his creatures, nay, in his enemies when thou shouldst have trusted in him only, he has abandoned thee to that destruction from which thou thoughtest thus to shelter thyself; and then thou *canst not prosper*, for none ever either hardened himself against God or estranged himself from God and prospered.

## CHAP. III.

The foregoing chapter was wholly taken up with reproofs and threatenings against the people of God, for their apostasies from him; but in this chapter gracious invitations and encouragements are given them to return and repent, notwithstanding the multitude and greatness of their provocations, which are here specified, to magnify the mercy of God, and to show that as sin abounded grace did much more abound. Here, I. It is further shown how bad they had been and how well they deserved to be quite abandoned, and yet how ready God was to receive them into his favour upon their repentance, ver. 1—5. II. The impenitence of Judah, and their persisting in sin, are aggravated from the judgments of God upon Israel, which they should have taken warning by, ver. 6—11. III. Great encouragements are given to these backsliders to return and repent, and promises made of great mercy which God had in store for them, and which he would prepare them for by bringing them home to himself, ver. 12—19. IV. The charge renewed against them for their apostasy from God, and the invitation repeated to return and repent, to which are here added the words that are put in their mouth, which they should make use of in their return to God, ver. 20—25.

**THEY** say, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? Shall not that land be greatly polluted? But thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the LORD. 2 Lift up thine eyes unto the high places, and see where thou hast not been lien with. In the ways hast thou sat for them, as the Arabian in the wilderness; and thou hast polluted the land with thy whoredoms and with thy wickedness. 3 Therefore the showers have been withholden, and there hath been no latter rain; and thou hadst a whore's forehead, thou refusedst to be ashamed. 4 Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My Father, thou art the guide of my youth? 5 Will he reserve his anger for ever? Will he keep it to the end? Behold, thou hast spoken and done evil things as thou couldst.

These verses some make to belong to the sermon in the foregoing chapter, and they open a door of hope to those who receive the conviction of the reproofs we had there; God wounds that he may heal. Now observe here,

I. How basely this people had forsaken God and gone a whoring from him. The charge runs very high here. 1. They had multiplied their idols and their idolatries. To have admitted one strange God among them would have been bad enough, but they were insatiable in their lustings after false worships: *Thou hast played the harlot with many lovers*, v. 1. She had become a common prostitute to idols; not a foolish deity was set up in all the neighbourhood but the Jews would have it quickly. Where was a high place in the country but they had had an idol in it? v. 2. Note, In repentance it is good to make sorrowful reflections upon the particular acts of sin we have been guilty of, and the several places and companies where it has been committed, that we may give glory to God and take shame to ourselves by a particular confession of it. 2. They had sought opportunity for their idolatries, and had sent about to enquire for new gods: *In the high-ways hast thou sat for them*, as Tamar when she put on the disguise of a harlot (Gen. xxxviii. 14), and as the foolish woman, that sits to call passengers, *who go right on their way*, Prov. ix. 14, 15 *As the Arabian in the wilderness—the Arabian huckster* (so some), that courts customers, or waits for the merchants to get a good bargain and forestal the market—or the Arabian thief (so others), that watches for his prey; so had they waited either to court new gods to come among them (the newer the better, and the more fond they were of them) or to court others to join with them in their idolatries. They were not only sinners, but Satans, not only traitors themselves, but tempters to others. 3. They had grown very impudent in sin. They not only polluted themselves, but their land, *with their whoredoms and with their wickedness* (v. 2); for it was universal and unpunished, and so became a national sin. And yet (v. 3), *“Thou hadst a whore's forehead, a brazen face of thy own. Thou refusedst to be ashamed; thou didst enough to shame thee for ever, and yet wouldst not take shame to thyself.”* Blushing is the colour of virtue, or at least a relic of it; but those that are past shame (we say) are past hope. Those that have an adulterer's heart, if they indulge that, will come at length to have a whore's forehead, void of all shame and modesty. 4. They abounded in all manner of sin. They polluted the land not only with their whoredoms (that is, their idolatries), but with their wickedness, or malice (v. 2), sins against the second table: for how can we think that those will be true to their neighbour that are false to their God? *“Nay (v. 5), thou hast spoken and done evil things as thou couldst, and wouldst have spoken and done worse if thou hadst known how; thy will was to do it, but thou lackedst opportunity.”* Note, Those are wicked indeed that sin to the utmost of their power, that never refuse to



comply with a temptation because they should not, but because they cannot.

II. How gently God had corrected them for their sins. Instead of raining fire and brimstone upon them, because, like Sodom, they had *avowed their sin* and had gone after strange gods as Sodom after strange flesh, he only *withheld the showers from them*, and that only one part of the year: *There has been no latter rain*, which might serve as an intimation to them of their continual dependence upon God; when they had the former rain, that was no security to them for the latter, but they must still look up to God. But it had not this effect.

III. How justly God might have abandoned them utterly, and refused ever to receive them again, though they should return; this would have been but according to the known rule of divorces, *v. 1. They say* (it is an adjudged case, nay, it is a case in which the law is very express, and it is what every body knows and speaks of, Deut. xxiv. 4), that if a woman be once put away for whoredom, and be joined to *another man*, her first husband shall never, upon any pretence whatsoever, take her again to be his wife; such playing fast and loose with the marriage-bond would be a horrid profanation of that ordinance and would *greatly pollute that land*. Observe, What the law says in this case—*They say*, that is, every one will say, and subscribe to the equity of the law in it; for every man finds something in himself that forbids him to entertain one that is *another man's*. And in like manner they had reason to expect that God would refuse ever to take them to be his people again, who had not only been joined to one strange god, but had *played the harlot with many lovers*. If we had to do with a man like ourselves, after such provocations as we have been guilty of, he would be implacable, and we might have despaired of his being reconciled to us.

IV. How graciously he not only invites them, but directs them, to return to him.

1. He encourages them to hope that they shall find favour with him, upon their repentance: "Though thou hast been bad, *yet return again to me*," *v. 1.* This implies a promise that he will receive them: "Return, and thou shalt be welcome." God has not tied himself by the laws which he made for us, nor has he the peevish resentment that men have; he will be more kind to Israel, for the sake of his covenant with them, than ever any injured husband was to an adulterous wife; for in receiving penitents, as much as in any thing, he is *God and not man*.

2. He therefore kindly expects that they will repent and return to him, and he directs them what to say to him (*v. 4*): "*Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me? Wilt not thou, who hast been in such relation to me, and on whom I have laid such obligations,*

*wilt not thou cry to me?* Though thou hast gone a whoring from me, yet, when thou findest the folly of it, surely thou wilt think of returning to me, now at least, now at last, in this thy day. Wilt thou not at this time, nay, wilt thou not from this time and forward, *cry unto me?* Whatever thou hast said or done hitherto, wilt thou not from this time apply to me? From this time of conviction and correction, now that thou hast been made to see thy sins (*v. 2*) and to smart for them (*v. 3*), wilt thou not now forsake them and return to me, saying, *I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better with me than now?*" Hos. ii. 7. Or "*from this time* that thou hast had so kind an invitation to return, and assurance that thou shalt be well received: will not this grace of God overcome thee? Now that pardon is proclaimed wilt thou not come in and take the benefit of it? Surely thou wilt."

(1.) He expects that they will claim relation to God, as theirs: *Wilt thou not cry unto me, My Father, thou art the guide of my youth?* [1.] They will surely come towards him as a father, to beg his pardon for their undutiful behaviour to him (*Father, I have sinned*) and will hope to find in him the tender compassions of a father towards a returning prodigal. They will come to him as a father, to whom they will make their complaints, and in whom they will put their confidence for relief and succour. They will now own him as their father, and themselves fatherless without him; and therefore, hoping to find mercy with him (as those penitents, Hos. xiv. 3), [2.] They will come to him as *the guide of their youth*, that is, as their husband, for so that relation is described, Mal. ii. 14. "Though thou hast gone after many lovers, surely thou wilt at length remember the love of thy espousals, and return to the husband of thy youth." Or it may be taken more generally: "*As my Father, thou art the guide of my youth.*" Youth needs a guide. In our return to God we must thankfully remember that he *was the guide of our youth* in the way of comfort; and we must faithfully covenant that he shall be our guide henceforward in the way of duty, and that we will follow his guidance, and give up ourselves entirely to it, that in all doubtful cases we will be determined by our religion.

(2.) He expects that they will appeal to the mercy of God and crave the benefit of that mercy (*v. 5*), that they will reason thus with themselves for their encouragement to return to him: "*Will he reserve his anger for ever?* Surely he will not, for he has proclaimed his name *gracious and merciful.*" Repenting sinners may encourage themselves with this, that, though God chide, he will not always chide, though he be angry, he will not keep his anger to the end, but, *though he cause grief, he will have compassion*, and may thus plead for reconciliation. Some understand

this as describing their hypocrisy, and the impudence of it: "Though thou hast a *whore's forehead* (v. 3) and art still *doing evil as thou canst* (v. 5), yet art thou not ever and anon *crying to me, My Father?*" Even when they were most addicted to idols they pretended a regard to God and his service and kept up the forms of godliness and devotion. It is a shameful thing for men thus to call God father, and yet to do the *works of the devil* (as the Jews, John viii. 44), to call him the *guide of their youth*, and yet give up themselves to *walk after the flesh*, and to flatter themselves with the expectation that *his anger shall have an end*, while they are continually *treasuring up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath*.

6 The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen *that which backsliding Israel hath done?* She is gone up upon every high mountain, and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot. 7 And I said after she had done all these *things*, Turn thou unto me. But she returned not. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. 8 And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also. 9 And it came to pass through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with stocks. 10 And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the LORD. 11 And the LORD said unto me, The backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah.

The date of this sermon must be observed, in order to the right understanding of it; it was in the days of Josiah, who set on foot a blessed work of reformation, in which he was hearty, but the people were not sincere in their compliance with it; to reprove them for that, and warn them of the consequences of their hypocrisy, is the scope of that which God here said to the prophet, and which he delivered to them. The case of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah is here compared, the *ten tribes* that revolted from the throne of David and the temple of Jerusalem and the *two tribes* that adhered to both. The distinct history of those two kingdoms we have in the two books of the Kings, and here

we have an abstract of both, as far as relates to this matter.

I. Here is a short account of Israel, the ten tribes. Perhaps the prophet had been just reading the history of that kingdom when God came to him, and said, *Hast thou seen what backsliding Israel has done?* v. 6. For he could not see it otherwise than in history, they having been carried into captivity long before he was born. But what we read in the histories of scripture should instruct us and affect us, as if we ourselves had been eye-witnesses of it. She is called *backsliding Israel* because that kingdom was first founded in an apostasy from the divine institutions, both in church and state. Now he had seen concerning them, 1. That they were wretchedly addicted to idolatry. They had *played the harlot upon every high mountain and under every green tree* (v. 6), that is, they had worshipped other gods in their high places and groves; and no marvel, when from the first they had worshipped God by the images of the *golden calves* at Dan and Bethel. The way of idolatry is down-hill: those that are in love with images, and will have them, soon become in love with other gods, and will have them too; for how should those stick at the breach of the first commandment who make no conscience of the second? 2. That God by his prophets had invited and encouraged them to repent and reform (v. 7): "*After she had done all these things*, for which she might justly have been abandoned, yet I said unto her, *Turn thou unto me and I will receive thee.*" Though they had forsaken both the house of David and the house of Aaron, who both had their authority *jure divino*—from God, without dispute, yet God sent his prophets among them, to call them to *return to him*, to the worship of him only, not insisting so much as one would have expected upon their return to the house of David, but pressing their return to the house of Aaron. We read not that Elijah, that great reformer, ever mentioned their return to the house of David, while he was anxious for their return to the faithful service of the true God according as they had it among them. It is serious piety that God stands upon more than even his own rituals. 3. That, notwithstanding this, they had persisted in their idolatries: *But she returned not*, and God *saw it*; he took notice of it, and was much displeased with it, v. 7, 8. Note, God keeps account, whether we do or no, how often he has called to us to turn to him and we have refused. 4. That he had therefore cast them off, and given them up into the hands of their enemies (v. 8): *When I saw* (so it may be read) *that for all the actions wherein she had committed adultery I must dismiss her, I gave her a bill of divorce.* God divorced them when he threw them out of his protection and left them an easy prey to any that would lay hands on them, when



he scattered all their synagogues and the schools of the prophets and excluded them from laying any further claim to the covenant made with their fathers. Note, Those will justly be divorced from God that join themselves to such as are rivals with him. For proof of this go and see what God did to Israel.

II. Let us now see what was the case of Judah, the kingdom of the two tribes. She is called *treacherous sister Judah*, a sister because descended from the same common stock, Abraham and Jacob; but, as Israel had the character of a *backslider*, so Judah is called *treacherous*, because, though she professed to keep close to God when Israel had backslidden (she adhered to the kings and priests that were of God's own appointing, and did not withdraw from her allegiance, so that it was expected she should deal faithfully), yet she proved treacherous, and false, and unfaithful to her professions and promises. Note, The treachery of those who pretend to cleave to God will be reckoned for, as well as the apostasy of those who openly revolt from him. Judah saw what Israel did, and what came of it, and should have taken warning. Israel's captivity was intended for Judah's admonition; but it had not the designed effect. Judah feared not, but thought herself safe because she had Levites to be her priests and sons of David to be her kings. Note, It is an evidence of great stupidity and security when we are not awakened to a holy fear by the judgments of God upon others. It is here charged on Judah, 1. That when they had a wicked king that debauched them they heartily concurred with him in his debaucheries. Judah was forward enough to *play the harlot*, to worship any idol that was introduced among them and to join in any idolatrous usage; so that *through the lightness* (or, as some read it, the *vileness* and *baseness*) of her *whoredom*, or (as the margin reads it) by the fame and report of her whoredom, her *notorious whoredom*, for which she had become infamous, she *defiled the land*, and made it an abomination to God; for she *committed adultery with stones and stocks*, with the basest idols, those made of wood and stone. In the reigns of Manasseh and Amon, when they were disposed to idolatry, the people were so too, and all the country was corrupted with it, and none feared the ruin which Israel by this means had brought upon themselves. 2. That when they had a good king, that reformed them, they did not heartily concur with him in the reformation. This was the present case. God tried whether they would be good in a good reign, but the evil disposition was still the same: *They returned not to me with their whole heart, but feignedly*, v. 10. Josiah went further in destroying idolatry than the best of his predecessors had done, and for his own part he *turned to*

*the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul*; so it is said of him, 2 Kings xxiii. 25. The people were forced to an external compliance with him, and joined with him in keeping a very solemn passover and in renewing their covenants with God (2 Chron. xxxiv. 32, xxxv. 17); but they were not sincere in it, nor were their hearts right with God. For this reason God at that very time said, *I will remove Judah out of my sight, as I removed Israel* (2 Kings xxiii. 27), because Judah was not removed from their sin by the sight of Israel's removal from their land. Hypocritical and ineffectual reformations bode ill to a people. We deceive ourselves if we think to deceive God by a feigned return to him. I know no religion without sincerity.

III. The case of these sister kingdoms is compared, and judgment given upon the comparison, that of the two Judah was the worse (v. 11): *Israel has justified herself more than Judah*, that is, she is not so bad as Judah is. This comparative justification will stand Israel in little stead; what will it avail us to say, *We are not so bad as others*, when yet we are not really good ourselves? But it will serve as an aggravation of the sin of Judah, which was in two respects worse than that of Israel:—1. More was expected from Judah than from Israel; so that Judah dealt treacherously, they vilified a more sacred profession, and falsified a more solemn promise, than Israel did. 2. Judah might have taken warning by the ruin of Israel for their idolatry, and would not. God's judgments upon others, if they be not means of our reformation, will help to aggravate our destruction. The prophet Ezekiel (*ch. xxiii.* 11) makes the same comparison between Jerusalem and Samaria that this prophet here makes between Judah and Israel, nay, and (Ezek. xvi. 48) between Jerusalem and Sodom, and Jerusalem is made the worst of the three.

12 Go, and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep anger for ever. 13 Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the LORD. 14 Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion: 15 And I will give you pastors

according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding. 16 And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the LORD, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the LORD: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more. 17 At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart. 18 In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given for an inheritance unto your fathers. 19 But I said, How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations? And I said, Thou shalt call me, My father; and shalt not turn away from me.

Here is a great deal of gospel in these verses, both that which was always gospel, God's readiness to pardon sin and to receive and entertain returning repenting sinners, and those blessings which were in a special manner reserved for gospel times, the forming and founding of the gospel church by bringing into it the *children of God that were scattered abroad*, the superseding of the ceremonial law, and the uniting of Jews and Gentiles, typified by the uniting of Israel and Judah in their return out of captivity. The prophet is directed to *proclaim these words towards the north*, for they are a call to backsliding Israel, the ten tribes that were carried captive into Assyria, which lay north from Jerusalem. That way he must look, to show that God had not forgotten them, though their brethren had, and to upbraid the men of Judah with their obstinacy in refusing to answer the calls given them. One might as well call to those who lay many hundred miles off in the land of the north; they would as soon hear as these unbelieving and disobedient people; *backsliding Israel* will sooner accept of mercy, and have the benefit of it, than *treacherous Judah*. And perhaps the proclaiming of these words towards the north looks as far forward as the *preaching of repentance and remission of sins unto all nations, beginning at Jerusalem*, Luke xxiv. 47. A call to Israel in the land of the north is a call to others in

that land, even as many as belong to the election of grace. When it was suspected that Christ would go to the dispersed Jews among the Gentiles, it was concluded that he would *teach the Gentiles*, John vii 35. So here.

1. Here is an invitation given to *backsliding Israel*, and in them to the backsliding Gentiles, to *return unto God*, the God from whom they had revolted (v. 12): *Return, thou backsliding Israel*. And again (v. 14): "*Turn, O backsliding children! repent of your backslidings, return to your allegiance, come back to that good way which you have missed and out of which you have turned aside.*" Pursuant to this invitation, 1. They are encouraged to return. "*Repent, and be converted, and your sins shall be blotted out,*" Acts iii. 19. You have incurred God's displeasure, but return to me, and *I will not cause my anger to fall upon you.*" God's anger is ready to fall upon sinners, as a lion falls on his prey, and there is none to deliver, as a mountain of lead falling on them, to sink them past recovery into the lowest hell. But if they repent it shall be turned away, Isa. xii. 1. *I will not keep my anger for ever, but will be reconciled, for I am merciful.* We that are sinful were for ever undone if God were not merciful; but the goodness of his nature encourages us to hope that, if we by repentance undo what we have done against him, he will by a pardon unsay what he has said against us. 2. They are directed how to return (v. 13): "*Only acknowledge thy iniquity, own thyself in a fault and thereby take shame to thyself and give glory to God.*" *I will not keep my anger for ever* (that is a previous promise); you shall be delivered from that anger of God which is everlasting, from the wrath to come; but upon what terms? Very easy and reasonable ones. *Only acknowledge thy sins. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive them.* This will aggravate the condemnation of sinners, that the terms of pardon and peace were brought so low, and yet they would not come up to them. *If the prophet had told thee to do some great thing wouldst thou not have done it? How much more when he says, Only acknowledge thy iniquity?* 2 Kings v. 13. In confessing sin, (1.) We must own the corruption of our nature: *Acknowledge thy iniquity*, the perverseness and irregularity of thy nature. (2.) We must own our actual sins: "*That thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God, hast affronted him and offended him.*" (3.) We must own the multitude of our transgressions: "*That thou hast scattered thy ways to the strangers, run hither and thither in pursuit of thy idols, under every green tree.*" Wherever thou hast rambled thou hast left behind thee the marks of thy folly. (4.) We must aggravate our sin from the disobedience that there is in it to the divine law. The sinfulness of sin is the worst thing in



it: "You have not obeyed my voice; acknowledge that, and let that humble you more than any thing else."

II. Here are precious promises made to these backsliding children, if they do return, which were in part fulfilled in the return of the Jews out of their captivity, many that belonged to the ten tribes having perhaps joined themselves to those of the two tribes, in the prospect of their deliverance, and returning with them; but the prophecy is to have its full accomplishment in the gospel church, and the gathering together of the children of God that were scattered abroad to that: "Return, for, though you are backsliders, yet you are children; nay, though a treacherous wife, yet a wife, for I am married to you (v. 14) and will not disown the relation. Thus God remembers his covenant with their fathers, that marriage covenant, and in consideration of that he remembers their land, Lev. xxvi. 42.

1. He promises to gather them together from all places whither they are dispersed and scattered abroad, John xi. 52, *I will take you, one of a city, and two of a family, or clan; and I will bring you to Zion, v. 14.* All those that by repentance return to their duty shall return to their former comfort. Observe, (1.) God will graciously receive those that return to him, nay, it is he that by his distinguishing grace takes them out from among the rest that persist in their backslidings; if he had left them, they would have been undone. (2.) Of the many that have backslidden from God there are but few, very few in comparison, that return to him, like the gleanings of the vintage—one of a city and two of a country; Christ's flock is a little flock, and few there are that find the strait gate. (3.) Of those few, though dispersed, yet not one shall be lost. Though there be but one in a city, God will find out that one; he shall not be overlooked in a crowd, but shall be brought safely to Zion, safely to heaven. The scattered Jews shall be brought to Jerusalem, and those of the ten tribes shall be as welcome there as those of the two. God's chosen, scattered all the world over, shall be brought to the gospel church, that Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, that holy hill on which Christ reigns.

2. He promises to set those over them that shall be every way blessings to them (v. 15): *I will give you pastors after my heart*, alluding to the character given of David when God pitched upon him to be king. 1 Sam. xiii. 14, *The Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart.* Observe, (1.) When a church is gathered it must be governed. *"I will bring them to Zion,* not to live as they list, but to be under discipline, not as wild beasts, that range at pleasure, but as sheep that are under the direction of a shepherd. *I will give them pastors,* that is, both magistrates and ministers; both are God's ordinance for the support of his kingdom.

(2.) It is well with a people when their pastors are *after God's own heart*, such as they should be, such as we would have them be, who shall make his will their rule in all their administrations, and such as endeavour in some measure to conform to his example, who rule for him, and, as they are capable, rule like him. (3.) Those are pastors after God's own heart who make it their business to feed the flock, not to feed themselves and fleece the flocks, but to do all they can for the good of those that are under their charge, who feed them with wisdom and understanding (that is, wisely and understandingly), as David fed them, in the integrity of his heart and by the skilfulness of his hand, Ps. lxxviii. 72. Those who are not only pastors, but teachers, must feed them with the word of God, which is wisdom and understanding, which is able to make us wise to salvation.

3. He promises that there shall be no more occasion for the ark of the covenant, which had been so much the glory of the tabernacle first and afterwards of the temple, and was the token of God's presence with them; that shall be set aside, and there shall be no more enquiry after, nor enquiring of, it (v. 16): *When you shall be multiplied and increased in the land*, when the kingdom of the Messiah shall be set up, which by the accession of the Gentiles will bring in to the church a vast increase (and the days of the Messiah the Jewish masters themselves acknowledge to be here intended), then they shall say no more, *The ark of the covenant of the Lord*, they shall have it no more among them to value, or value themselves upon, because they shall have a pure spiritual way of worship set up, in which there shall be no occasion for any of those external ordinances; with the ark of the covenant the whole ceremonial law shall be set aside, and all the institutions of it, for Christ, the truth of all those types, exhibited to us in the word and sacraments of the New Testament, will be to us instead of all. It is very likely (whatever the Jews suggest to the contrary) that the ark of the covenant was in the second temple, being restored by Cyrus with the other vessels of the house of the Lord, Ezra i. 7. But in the gospel temple Christ is the ark; he is the propitiatory, or mercy-seat; and it is the spiritual presence of God in his ordinances that we are now to expect. Many expressions are here used concerning the setting aside of the ark, that it shall not come to mind, that they shall not remember it, that they shall not visit it, that none of these things shall be any more done; for the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, John iv. 24. But this variety of expressions is used to show that the ceremonies of the law of Moses should be totally and finally abolished, never to be used any more, but that it would be with difficulty that those who had been so long wedded to them should be weaned from them;

and that they would not quite let them go till their holy city and holy house should both be levelled with the ground.

4. He promises that the gospel church, here called *Jerusalem*, shall become eminent and conspicuous, v. 17. Two things shall make it famous:—(1.) God's special residence and dominion in it. It shall be called, *The throne of the Lord*—the throne of his glory, for that shines forth in the church—the throne of his government, for that also is erected there; there he rules his willing people by his word and Spirit, and brings every thought into obedience to himself. As the gospel got ground this *throne of the Lord* was set up even where *Satan's seat* had been. It is especially the throne of his grace; for those that by faith come to this Jerusalem come to *God the judge of all*, and to *Jesus the mediator of the new covenant*, Heb. xii. 22—24. (2.) The accession of the Gentiles to it. *All the nations shall be disciplined*, and so gathered to the church, and shall become subjects to that *throne of the Lord* which is there set up, and devoted to the honour of that name of the Lord which is there both manifested and called upon.

5. He promises that there shall be a wonderful reformation wrought in those that are gathered to the church: *They shall not walk any more after the imagination of their evil hearts*. They shall not live as they list, but live by rules, not do according to their own corrupt appetites, but according to the will of God. See what leads in sin—the *imagination of our own evil hearts*; and what sin is—it is *walking after* that imagination, being governed by fancy and humour; and what converting grace does—it takes us off from walking after *our own inventions* and brings us to be governed by religion and right reason.

6. That Judah and Israel shall be happily united in one body, v. 18. They were so in their return out of captivity and their settlement again in Canaan: *The house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel*, as being perfectly agreed, and become *one stick in the hand of the Lord*, as Ezekiel also foretold, ch. xxxvii. 16, 17. Both Assyria and Chaldaea fell into the hands of Cyrus, and his proclamation extended to all the Jews in all his dominions. And therefore we have reason to think that many of the house of Israel came with those of Judah out of the land of the north; though at first there returned but 42,000 (whom we have an account of, Ezra ii.) yet Josephus says (*Antiq. lib. 11. cap. 4*) that some few years after, under Darius, Zerubbabel went and fetched up above 4,000,000 of souls, to the land that was given for an inheritance to their fathers. And we never read of such animosities and enmities between Israel and Judah as had been formerly. This happy coalescence between Israel and Judah in Canaan was a type of the uniting of Jews and Gentiles in the gospel church, when, all enmities being slain,

they should become one *sheepfold under one shepherd*.

III. Here is some difficulty started, that lies in the way of all this mercy; but an expedient is found to get over it.

1. God asks, *How shall I do this for thee?* Not as if God showed favour with reluctance, as he punishes with a *How shall I give thee up?* Hos. xi. 8, 9. No, though he is slow to anger, he is swift to show mercy. But it intimates that we are utterly unworthy of his favours, that we have no reason to expect them, that there is nothing in us to deserve them, that we can lay no claim to them, and that he contrives how to do it in such a way as may save the honour of his justice and holiness in the government of the world. Means must be devised that his banished be not for ever expelled from him, 2 Sam. xiv. 14. How shall I do it? (1.) Even backsliders, if they return and repent, shall be put among the children; and who could ever have expected that? Behold what manner of love is this! 1 John iii. 1. How should we who are so mean and weak, so worthless and unworthy, and so provoking, ever be put among the children. (2.) To those whom God puts among the children he will give the pleasant land, the land of Canaan, that glory of all lands, that goodly heritage of the hosts of nations, which nations and their hosts wish for and prefer to their own country, or which the hosts of the nations have now got possession of. It was a type of heaven, where there are pleasures for evermore. Now who could expect a place in that pleasant land that has so often despised it (Ps. cvi. 24) and is so unworthy of it and unfit for it? Is this the manner of men?

2. He does himself return answer to this question: *But I said, Thou shalt call me, My Father*. God does himself answer all the objections that are taken from our unworthiness, or they would never be got over. (1.) That he may put returning penitents among the children, he will give them the Spirit of adoption, teaching them to cry, *Abba, Father*, Gal. iv. 6. "*Thou shalt call me, My Father: thou shalt return to me, and resign thyself to me as a father, and that shall recommend thee to my favour.*" (2.) That he may give them the pleasant land, he will put his fear in their hearts, that they may never turn from him, but may persevere to the end.

20 Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the LORD. 21 A voice was heard upon the high places, weeping and supplications of the children of Israel: for they have perverted their way, and they have forgotten the LORD their God. 22 Return, ye backsliding children, and



I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the LORD our God. 23 Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel. 24 For shame hath devoured the labour of our fathers from our youth; their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters. 25 We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us: for we have sinned against the LORD our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even unto this day, and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God.

Here is, I. The charge God exhibits against Israel for their treacherous departures from him, v. 20. As an adulterous wife elopes from her husband, so have they gone a whoring from God. They were joined to God by a marriage-covenant, but they broke that covenant, they dealt treacherously with God, who had always dealt kindly and faithfully with them. Treacherous dealing with men like ourselves is bad enough, but to deal treacherously with God is to deal treasonably.

II. Their conviction and confession of the truth of this charge, v. 21. When God reproved them for their apostasy, there were some among them, even such as God would take and bring to Zion, whose voice was heard upon the high places weeping and praying, humbling themselves before the God of their fathers, lamenting their calamities, and their sins, the procuring cause of them; for this is that which they lament, for this they bemoan themselves, that they have perverted their way and forgotten the Lord their God. Note, 1. Sin is the perverting of our way, it is turning aside to crooked ways and perverting that which is right. 2. Forgetting the Lord our God is at the bottom of all sin. If men would remember God, his eye upon them and their obligation to him, they would not transgress as they do. 3. By sin we embarrass ourselves, and bring ourselves into trouble, for that also is the perverting of our way, Lam. iii. 9. 4. Prayers and tears well become those whose consciences tell them that they have perverted their way and forgotten their God. When the foolishness of man perverts his way his heart is apt to fret against the Lord (Prov. xix. 3), whereas it should be melted and poured out before him.

III. The invitation God gives them to return to him (v. 22): *Return, you backsliding children.* He calls them children in tenderness and compassion to them, foolish and froward as children, yet his sons, whom though he corrects he will not disinherit;

for, though they are refractory children (so some render it), yet they are children. God bears with such children, and so must parents. When they are convinced of sin (v. 21), and humbled for that, then they are prepared and then they are invited to return, as Christ invites those to him that are weary and heavy-laden. The promise to those that return is, "*I will heal your backslidings*; I will comfort you under the grief you are in for your backslidings, deliver you out of the troubles you have brought yourselves into by your backslidings, and cure you of your refractoriness and tendency to backslide." God will heal our backslidings by his pardoning mercy, his quieting peace, and his renewing grace.

IV. The ready consent they give to this invitation, and their cheerful compliance with it: *Behold, we come unto thee.* This is an echo to God's call; as a voice returned from broken walls, so this from broken hearts. God says, *Return*; they answer, *Behold, we come.* It is an immediate speedy answer, without delay, not, "We will come hereafter," but, "We do come now; we need not take time to consider of it;" no, "We come towards thee," but, "We come to thee, we will make a thorough turn of it." Observe how unanimous they are: *We come, one and all.* 1. They come devoting themselves to God as theirs: "*Thou art the Lord our God*; we take thee to be ours, we give up ourselves to thee to be thine; whither shall we go but to thee? It is our sin and folly that we have gone from thee." It is very comfortable, in our returns to God after our backslidings, to look up to him as ours in covenant. 2. They come disclaiming all expectations of relief and succour but from God only: "*In vain is salvation hoped for from the hills and from the multitude of the mountains*; we now see our folly in relying upon creature-confidences, and will never so deceive ourselves any more." They worshipped their idols upon hills and mountains (v. 6), and they had a multitude of idols upon their mountains, which they had sought unto and put a confidence in; but now they will have no more to do with them. In vain do we look for any thing that is good from them, while from God we may look for every thing that is good, even salvation itself. Therefore, 3. They come depending upon God only as their God: *In the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel.* He is the Lord, and he only can save; he can save when all other succours and saviours fail; and he is our God, and will in his own way and time work salvation for us. It is very applicable to the great salvation from sin, which Jesus Christ wrought out for us; that is the *salvation of the Lord*, his great salvation. 4. They come justifying God in their troubles and judging themselves for their sins, v. 24, 25. (1.) They impute all the calamities they had been under to their idols, which had not only

done them no good, but had done them abundance of mischief, all the mischief that had been done them: *Shame* (the idol, that shameful thing) *has devoured the labour of our fathers*. Note, [1.] True penitents have learned to call sin *shame*; even the beloved sin which has been as an idol to them, which they have been most pleased with and proud of, even that they shall call a scandalous thing, shall put contempt upon it and be ashamed of it. [2.] True penitents have learned to call sin death and ruin, and to charge upon it all the mischiefs they suffer: "It has *devoured* all those good things which our fathers *laboured for* and left to us; we have found *from our youth* that our idolatry has been the destruction of our prosperity." Children often throw away upon their lusts that which their fathers took a great deal of pains for; and it is well if at length they are brought (as these here) to see the folly of it, and to call those vices their shame which have wasted their estates and *devoured the labour of their fathers*. Of the labour of their fathers, which their idols had devoured, they mention particularly *their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters*. First, Their idolatries had provoked God to bring these desolating judgments upon them, which had ruined their country and families, and made their estates a prey and their children captives to the conquering enemy. They had *procured these things to themselves*. Or, rather, Secondly, These had been sacrificed to their idols, had been *separated unto that shame* (Hos. ix. 10), and they had devoured them without mercy; they did *eat the fat of their sacrifices* (Deut. xxxii. 38), even their human sacrifices. (2.) They take to themselves the shame of their sin and folly (v. 25): "*We lie down in our shame, being unable to bear up under it; our confusion covers us*, that is, both our penal and our penitential shame. Sin has laid us under such rebukes of God's providence, and such reproaches of our own consciences, as surround us and fill us with shame. For *we have sinned*, and shame came in with sin and still attends upon it. We are sinners by descent; guilt and corruption are entailed upon us: *We and our fathers have sinned*. We were sinners betimes; we began early in a course of sin: We have sinned *from our youth*; we have continued in sin, have sinned *even unto this day*, though often called to repent and forsake our sins. That which is the malignity of sin, the worst thing in it, is the affront we have put upon God by it: *We have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God*, forbidding us to sin and commanding us, when we have sinned, to repent." Now all this seems to be the language of the penitents of the house of Israel (v. 20), of the ten tribes, either of those that were in captivity or those of them that remained in their own land. And the prophet takes notice of their repentance to

provoke the men of Judah to a holy emulation. David used it as an argument with the elders of Judah that it would be a shame for those that were *his bone and his flesh* to be *the last in bringing the king back*, when the men of Israel appeared forward in it, 2 Sam. xix. 11, 12. So the prophet excites Judah to repent because Israel did: and well it were if the zeal of others less likely would provoke us to strive to get before them and go beyond them in that which is good.

## CHAP. IV.

It should seem that the first two verses of this chapter might better have been joined to the close of the foregoing chapter, for they are directed to Israel, the ten tribes, by way of reply to their compliance with God's call, directing and encouraging them to hold their resolution, ver. 1, 2. The rest of the chapter concerns Judah and Jerusalem. 1. They are called to repent and reform, ver. 3, 4. 11. They are warned of the advance of Nebuchadnezzar and his forces against them, and are told that it is for their sins, from which they are again exhorted to wash themselves, ver. 5—18. 111. To affect them the more with the greatness of the desolation that was coming, the prophet does himself bitterly lament it, and sympathize with his people in the calamities it brought upon them, and the plunge it brought them to, representing it as a reduction of the world to its first chaos, ver. 19—31.

**I**F thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the LORD, return unto me: and if thou wilt put away thine abominations out of my sight, then shalt thou not remove. 2 And thou shalt swear, The LORD liveth, in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness; and the nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory.

When God called to backsliding Israel to return (ch. iii. 22) they immediately answered, *Lord, we return*; now God here takes notice of their answer, and, by way of reply to it,

I. He directs them how to pursue their good resolutions: "Dost thou say, *I will return*?" 1. "Then thou must *return unto me*; make a thorough work of it. Do not only turn from thy idolatries, but return to the instituted worship of the God of Israel." Or, "Thou must return speedily and not delay (as Isa. xxi. 12, *If you will enquire, enquire you*); if you will return unto me, return you: do not talk of it, but do it." 2. Thou must utterly abandon all sin, and not retain any of the relics of idolatry: *Put away thy abominations out of my sight*," that is, out of all places (for every place is under the eye of God), especially out of the temple, the house which he had in a particular manner his eye upon, to see that it was kept clean. It intimates that their idolatries were not only obvious, but offensive, to the eye of God. They were abominations which he could not endure the sight of; therefore they must be *put away out of his sight*, because they were a provocation to the pure eyes of God's glory. Sin must be put away out of the heart, else it is not put away out of God's sight, for the heart and all that is in it lie open before his eye. 3. They must not return to sin again; so some understand that, *Thou shalt not remove*, reading it, *Thou*



shalt not, or must not, wander. "If thou wilt put away thy abominations, and wilt not wander after them again, as thou hast done, all shall be well." 4. They must give unto God the glory due unto his name (v. 2): "Thou shalt swear, The Lord liveth. His existence shall be with thee the most sacred fact, than which nothing can be more sure, and his judgment the supreme court to which thou shalt appeal, than which nothing can be more awful." Swearing is an act of religious worship, in which we are to give honour to God three ways:—(1.) We must swear by the true God only, and not by creatures, or any false gods,—by the God that liveth, not by the gods that are deaf and dumb and dead,—by him only, and not by the Lord and by Malcham, as Zeph. i. 5. (2.) We must swear that only which is true, in truth and in righteousness, not daring to assert that which is false, or which we do not know to be true, nor to assert that as certain which is doubtful, nor to promise that which we mean not to perform, nor to violate the promise we have made. To say that which is untrue, or to do that which is unrighteous, is bad, but to back either with an oath is much worse. (3.) We must do it solemnly, swear in judgment, that is, when judicially called to it, and not in common conversation. Rash swearing is as great a profanation of God's name as solemn swearing is an honour to it. See Deut. x. 20; Matt. v. 34, 37.

II. He encourages them to keep in this good mind and adhere to their resolutions. If the scattered Israelites will thus return to God, 1. They shall be blessed themselves; for to that sense the first words may be read: "If thou wilt return to me, then thou shalt return, that is, thou shalt be brought back out of thy captivity into thy own land again, as was of old promised," Deut. iv. 29; xxx. 2. Or, "Then thou shalt rest in me, shalt return to me as thy rest, even while thou art in the land of thy captivity." 2. They shall be blessings to others; for their returning to God again will be a means of others turning to him who never knew him. If thou wilt own the living Lord, thou wilt thereby influence the nations among whom thou art to bless themselves in him, to place their happiness in his favour and to think themselves happy in being brought to the fear of him. See Isa. lxxv. 16. They shall bless themselves in the God of truth, and not in false gods, shall do themselves the honour, and give themselves the satisfaction, to join themselves to him; and then in him shall they glory; they shall make him their glory, and shall please, nay, shall pride, themselves in the blessed change they have made. Those that part with their sins to return to God, however they scrupled at the bargain at first, when they go away, then they boast.

3 For thus saith the LORD to the

men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns. 4 Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.

The prophet here turns his speech, in God's name, to the men of the place where he lived. We have heard what words he proclaimed towards the north (ch. iii. 12), for the comfort of those that were now in captivity and were humbled under the hand of God; let us now see what he says to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, who were now in prosperity, for their conviction and awakening. In these two verses he exhorts them to repentance and reformation, as the only way left them to prevent the desolating judgments that were ready to break in upon them. Observe,

I. The duties required of them, which they are concerned to do.

1. They must do by their hearts as they do by their ground that they expect any good of; they must plough it up (v. 3): "Break up your fallow-ground. Plough to yourselves a ploughing (or plough up your plough land), that you sow not among thorns, that you may not labour in vain, for your own safety and welfare, as those do that sow good seed among thorns, and as you have been doing a great while. Put yourselves into a frame fit to receive mercy from God, and put away all that which keeps it from you, and then you may expect to receive mercy and to prosper in your endeavours to help yourselves." Note, (1.) An unconvinced unhumiliated heart is like fallow-ground, ground untilled, unoccupied. It is ground capable of improvement; it is our ground, let out to us, and we must be accountable for it; but it is fallow; it is unfenced and lies common; it is unfruitful and of no advantage to the owner, and (which is principally intended) it is overgrown with thorns and weeds, which are the natural product of the corrupt heart; and, if it be not renewed with grace, rain and sunshine are lost upon it, Heb. vi. 7, 8. (2.) We are concerned to get this fallow-ground ploughed up. We must search into our own hearts, let the word of God divide (as the plough does) between the joints and the marrow, Heb. iv. 12. We must pluck up by the roots those corruptions which, as thorns, choke both our endeavours and our expectations, Hos. x. 12.

2. They must do that to their souls which was done to their bodies when they were taken into covenant with God (v. 4): "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskin of your heart. Mortify the flesh

and the lusts of it. Pare off that *superfluity of naughtiness* which hinders your receiving with meekness the engrafted word, Jam. i. 21. Boast not of, and rest not in, the circumcision of the body, for that is but a sign, and will not serve without the thing signified. It is a dedicating sign. Do that in sincerity which was done in profession by your circumcision; devote and consecrate yourselves unto the Lord, to be to him a peculiar people. Circumcision is an *obligation to keep the law*; lay yourselves afresh under that obligation. It is a *seal of the righteousness of faith*; lay hold then of that righteousness, and so *circumcise yourselves to the Lord.*"

II. The danger they are threatened with, which they are concerned to avoid. Repent and reform, *lest my fury come forth like fire*, which it is now ready to do, as that fire which came forth from the Lord and consumed the sacrifices, and which was always kept burning upon the altar and none might quench it; such is God's wrath against impenitent sinners, *because of the evil of their doings*. Note, 1. That which is to be dreaded by us more than any thing else is the wrath of God; for that is the spring and bitterness of all present miseries and will be the quintessence and perfection of everlasting misery. 2. It is the *evil of our doings* that kindles the fire of God's wrath against us. 3. The consideration of the imminent danger we are in of falling and perishing under this wrath should awaken us with all possible care to *sanctify ourselves to God's glory* and to see to it that we be *sanctified by his grace*.

5 Declare ye in Judah, and publish in Jerusalem; and say, Blow ye the trumpet in the land: cry, gather together, and say, Assemble yourselves, and let us go into the defenced cities. 6 Set up the standard toward Zion: retire, stay not: for I will bring evil from the north, and a great destruction. 7 The lion is come up from his thicket, and the destroyer of the Gentiles is on his way; he is gone forth from his place to make thy land desolate; and thy cities shall be laid waste, without an inhabitant. 8 For this gird you with sackcloth, lament and howl: for the fierce anger of the LORD is not turned back from us. 9 And it shall come to pass at that day, saith the LORD, that the heart of the king shall perish, and the heart of the princes; and the priests shall be astonished, and the prophets shall wonder. 10 Then said I, Ah, Lord God! surely thou hast greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem,

saying, Ye shall have peace; whereas the sword reacheth unto the soul. 11 At that time shall it be said to this people and to Jerusalem, A dry wind of the high places in the wilderness toward the daughter of my people, not to fan, nor to cleanse, 12 *Even* a full wind from those *places* shall come unto me: now also will I give sentence against them. 13 Behold, he shall come up as clouds, and his chariots *shall be* as a whirlwind: his horses are swifter than eagles. Woe unto us! for we are spoiled. 14 O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee? 15 For a voice declareth from Dan, and publisheth affliction from mount Ephraim. 16 Make ye mention to the nations; behold, publish against Jerusalem, *that* watchers come from a far country, and give out their voice against the cities of Judah. 17 As keepers of a field, are they against her round about; because she hath been rebellious against me, saith the LORD. 18 Thy way and thy doings have procured these *things* unto thee; this *is* thy wickedness, because it is bitter, because it reacheth unto thine heart.

God's usual method is to warn before he wounds. In these verses, accordingly, God gives notice to the Jews of the general desolation that would shortly be brought upon them by a foreign invasion. This must be declared and published in all the cities of Judah and streets of Jerusalem, that all might hear and fear, and by this loud alarm be either brought to repentance or left inexcusable. The prediction of this calamity is here given very largely, and in lively expressions, which one would think should have awakened and affected the most stupid. Observe,

I. The war proclaimed, and general notice given of the advance of the enemy. It is published now, some years before, by the prophet; but, since this will be slighted, it shall be published after another manner when the judgment is actually breaking in, v. 5, 6. The trumpet must be blown, the standard must be set up, a summons must be issued out to the people to gather together and to draw towards Zion, either to guard it or expecting to be guarded by it. There must be a general rendezvous. The militia must be raised and all the forces mustered.



Those that are able men, and fit for service, must *go into the defenced cities*, to garrison them; those that are weak, and would lessen their provisions, but not increase their strength, must *retire, and not stay*.

II. An express arrived with intelligence of the approach of the king of Babylon and his army. It is an evil that God will *bring from the north* (as he had said, *ch. i. 15*), *even a great destruction*, beyond all that had yet come upon the nation of the Jews. The enemy is here compared, 1. *To a lion that comes up from his thicket*, when he is hungry, to seek his prey, *v. 7*. The helpless beasts are so terrified with his roaring (as some report) that they cannot flee from him, and so become an easy prey to him. Nebuchadnezzar is this roaring tearing lion, *the destroyer of the nations*, that has laid many countries waste, and now is *on his way* in full speed towards the land of Judah. *The destroyer of the Gentiles* shall be the *destroyer of the Jews* too, when they have by their idolatry made themselves like the Gentiles. "He has *gone forth from his place*, from Babylon, or the place of the rendezvous of his army, on purpose against *this land*; that is the prey he has now his eye upon, not to plunder it only, but to make it desolate, and herein he shall succeed to such a degree that the cities shall be *laid waste, without inhabitants, shall be overgrown with grass* as a field; so some read it. 2. *To a drying blasting wind* (*v. 11*), a parching scorching wind, which spoils the fruits of the earth and withers them, not a wind which brings rain, but such as comes *out of the north*, which *drives away rain* (Prov. xxv. 23), but brings something worse instead of it; such shall this evil out of the north be to this people, a *black freezing wind*, which they can neither fence against nor flee from, but, wherever they go, it shall surround and pursue them; and they cannot see it before it comes, but, when it comes, they shall feel it. It is a *wind of the high places in the wilderness, or plain*, that beats upon the tops of the hills or that carries all before it in the plain, where there is no shelter, but the ground is all champaign. It shall come in its full force *towards the daughters of my people*, that have been brought up so tenderly and delicately that they could not endure to have the wind blow upon them. Now this fierce wind shall come against them, *not to fan, nor cleanse* them, not such a gentle wind as is used in winnowing corn, but a *full wind* (*v. 12*), a strong and violent wind, blowing full upon them. This shall come *to me*, or rather *for me*; it shall come with commission from God and shall accomplish that for which he sends it; for this, as other *stormy winds, fulfils his word*. 3. *To clouds and whirlwinds* for swiftness, *v. 13*. The Chaldean army shall *come up as clouds* driven with the wind, so thick shall they stand, so fast shall they march, and it shall be to no purpose to offer

to stop them or to make head against them any more than to arrest a cloud or give check to a whirlwind. The horses are *swifter than eagles* when they fly upon their prey; it is in vain to think either of opposing them or of outrunning them. 4. *To watchers and the keepers of a field, v. 15—17*. *The voice declares from Dan*, a city which lay furthest north of all the cities of Canaan, and therefore received the first tidings of this evil from the north and hastened it to Mount Ephraim, that part of the land of Israel which lay next to Judea; they received the news of the affliction and transmitted it to Jerusalem. Ill news flies apace; and an impenitent people, that hates to be reformed, can expect no other than ill news. Now, what is the news? "*Tell the nations*, those mixed nations that now inhabit the cities of the ten tribes, mention it to them, that they may provide for their own safety; but publish it *against Jerusalem*, that is the place aimed at, the game shot at, let them know that *watchers have come from a far country*, that is, soldiers, that will watch all opportunities to do mischief." Private soldiers we call *private sentinels, or watchmen*. "They are coming in full career, and *give out their voice against the cities of Judah*; they design to invest them, to make themselves masters of them, and to attack them with loud shouts, as sure of victory. As *keepers of a field* surround it, to keep all out from it, so shall they surround the cities of Judah, to keep all in them, till they be constrained to surrender at discretion; they are *against her round about, compassing her in on every side*." See Luke xix. 43. As formerly the good angels, *those watchers and holy ones*, were like *keepers of a field* to Jerusalem, watching about it, that nothing might go in to its prejudice, so now their enemies were as *watchers and keepers of a field*, surrounding it that nothing might go in to its relief and succour.

III. The lamentable cause of this judgment. How is it that Judah and Jerusalem come to be thus abandoned to ruin? See how it came to this. 1. They sinned against God; it was all owing to themselves: *She has been rebellious against me, saith the Lord, v. 17*. Their enemies surrounded them as keepers of a field, because they had taken up arms against their rightful Lord and sovereign, and were to be seized as rebels. The Chaldeans were breaking in upon them, and it was sin that opened the gap at which they entered: *Thy way and thy doings have procured these things unto thee* (*v. 18*), thy evil way and thy doings that have not been good. It was not a false step or two that did them this mischief, but their way and course of living were bad. Note, Sin is the procuring cause of all our troubles. Those that go on in sin while they are endeavouring to ward off mischiefs with one hand are at the same time pulling them upon their own heads with the other. 2. God was angry with them



for their sin. It is the *fierce anger of the Lord* that makes the army of the Chaldeans thus fierce, thus furious; that is kindled against us, and is *not turned back from us*, v. 8. Note, In men's anger against us, and the violence of that, we must see and own God's anger and the power of that. If that were turned back from us, our enemies could not come forward against us. 3. In his just and holy anger he condemned them to this dreadful punishment: *Now also will I give sentence against them*, v. 12. The execution was done, not in a heat, but in pursuance of a sentence solemnly passed, according to equity, and upon mature deliberation. Some read it, *Now will I do execution upon them*, according to the doom formerly passed; and *we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth*, and the execution of that judgment.

IV. The lamentable effects of this judgment, upon the first alarm given of it. 1. The people that should fight shall quite despair and shall not have a heart to make the least stand against the enemy (v. 8): "*For this gird yourself with sackcloth, lament and howl*," that is, "you will do so. When the cry is made through the kingdom, *Arm, arm!* all will be seized with a consternation, and all put into confusion. Instead of girding on the sword, they will gird on the sackcloth; instead of animating one another to a vigorous resistance, they will *lament and howl*, and so dishearten one another. While the enemy is yet at a distance they will give up all for gone, and cry, *Woe unto us! for we are spoiled*, v. 13. We are all undone, the spoilers will certainly carry the day, and it is in vain to make head against them." Judah and Jerusalem had been famed for valiant men; but see what is the effect of sin: by depriving men of their confidence towards God, it deprives them of their courage towards men. 2. Their great men, who should contrive for the public safety, shall be at their wits' end (v. 9): *At that day the heart of the king shall perish*, both his wisdom and his courage. Despairing of success, he shall have no spirit to do any thing, and, if he had, he will not know what to do. His princes and privy-counsellors, who should animate and advise him, shall be as much at a loss and as much in despair as he. See how easily, how effectually, God can bring ruin upon a people that are doomed to it, merely by dispiriting them, *taking away the heart of the chief of them* (Job xii. 20, 24), *cutting off the spirit of princes*, Ps. lxxvi. 12. The business of the priests was to encourage the people in the time of war; they were to say to the people, *Fear not, and let not your hearts faint*, Deut. xx. 2, 3. They were to blow the trumpets, for an assurance to them that in the day of battle they should be remembered before the Lord their God, Num. x. 9. But now the priests themselves shall be astonished, and shall have no heart

themselves to do their office, and therefore shall not be likely to put spirit into the people. The prophets too, the false prophets, who had cried *peace* to them, shall be put into the greatest amazement imaginable, seeing their own guilty blood ready to be shed by that sword which they had often told the people there was no danger of. Note, God's judgments come with the greatest terror upon those that have been most secure. Our Saviour foretels that at the last destruction of Jerusalem *men's hearts* should fail them for fear, Luke xxi. 26. And it is common for those who have cheated and flattered people into a carnal security not only to fail them, but to discourage them, when the trouble comes.

V. The prophet's complaint of the people's being deceived, v. 10. It is expressed strangely, as we read it: *Ah! Lord God, surely thou hast greatly deceived this people, saying, You shall have peace*. We are sure that God deceives none. *Let no man say, when he is tempted or deluded, that God has tempted or deluded him*. But, 1. The people deceived themselves with the promises that God had made in general of his favour to that nation, and the many peculiar privileges with which they were dignified, building upon them, though they took no care to perform the conditions on which the accomplishment of those promises and the continuance of those privileges did depend; and they had no regard to the threatenings which in the law were set over-against those promises. Thus they cheated themselves and then wickedly complained that God had cheated them. 2. The false prophets deceived them with promises of peace, which they made them in God's name, ch. xxiii. 17; xxvii. 9. If God had sent them, he had indeed greatly deceived the people, but he had not. It was the people's fault that they gave them credit; and here also they deceived themselves. 3. God had permitted the false prophets to deceive, and the people to be deceived by them, giving both up to strong delusions, to punish them for not receiving the truth in the love of it. Herein the Lord was righteous; but the prophet complains of it as the sorest judgment of all, for by this means they had been hardened in their sins. 4. It may be read with an interrogation, "*Hast thou indeed thus deceived this people?*" It is plain that they are greatly deceived, for they expect *peace*, whereas the sword reaches unto the soul; that is, it is a killing sword, abundance of lives are lost, and more likely to be." Now, was it God that deceived them? No, he had often given them warning of judgments in general and of this in particular; but their own prophets deceive them, and cry peace to those to whom the God of heaven does not speak peace. It is a pitiable thing, and that which every good man greatly laments, to see people flattered into their own ruin, and promising



themselves peace when war is at the door ; and this we should complain of to God, who alone can prevent such a fatal delusion.

VI. The prophet's endeavour to undeceive them. When the prophets they loved and caressed dealt falsely with them, he whom they hated and persecuted dealt faithfully.

1. He shows them their wound. They were loth to see it, very loth to have it searched into ; but, if they will allow themselves the liberty of a free thought, they might discover their punishment in their sin (v. 18) : "*This is thy wickedness, because it is bitter.*" Now thou seest that it is a bitter thing to depart from God, and will certainly be *bitterness in the latter end*, ch. ii. 19. It produces bitter effects, and grief that *reaches unto the heart*, touches to the quick, and in the most tender part ; the sword *reaches to the soul*," v. 10. God can make trouble reach the heart even of those that would lay nothing to heart.

"And by this thou mayest see *what is thy wickedness*, that it is a bitter thing, a root of bitterness, that bears gall and wormwood, and that it has *reached to the heart* ; it is the corruption of the soul, of the *imagination of the thought of the heart*." If the heart were not polluted with sin, it would not be disturbed and disquieted as it is with trouble. 2. He shows them the cure, v. 14. "*Since thy wickedness reaches to the heart*, there the application must be made. *O Jerusalem ! wash thy heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved.*" By Jerusalem he means each one of the inhabitants of Jerusalem ; for every man has a heart of his own to take care of, and it is personal reformation that must help the public. Every one must return from *his own evil way*, and, in order to that, cleanse *his own evil heart*. "And let the heart of the city too be purified, not the suburbs only, the outskirts of it." The vitals of a state must be amended by the reformation of those that have the commanding influence upon it. Note, (1.) Reformation is absolutely necessary to salvation. There is no other way of preventing judgments, or turning them away when we are threatened with them, but taking away the sin by which we have procured them to ourselves. (2.) No reformation is saving but that which reaches the heart. There is heart-wickedness that is defiling to the soul, from which we must wash ourselves. By repentance and faith we must wash our hearts from the guilt we have contracted by spiritual wickedness, by those sins which begin and end in the heart and go no further ; and by mortification and watchfulness we must suppress and prevent this heart-wickedness for the future. The tree must be made good, else the fruit will not. Jerusalem was all overspread with the leprosy of sin. Now as the physicians agree with respect to the body when afflicted with leprosy that external applications will do no good, unless physic be taken inwardly to carry off the humours that

lurk there and to change the mass of the blood, so it is with the soul, so it is with the state : there will be no effectual reformation of the manners without a reformation of the mind ; the mistakes there must be rectified, the corruptions there must be mortified, and the evil dispositions there changed. "Though thou art Jerusalem, called a *holy city*, that will not save thee, unless thou *wash thy heart from wickedness*." In the latter part of the verse he reasons with them : *How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee ?* He complains here, [1.] Of the delays of their reformation : "*How long shall that filthy heart of thine continue unwashed ?* When shall it once be ?" Note, The God of heaven thinks the time long that his room is usurped, and his interest opposed, in our souls, ch. xiii. 27. [2.] Of the root of their corruption, the *vain thoughts that lodged within them* and defiled their hearts, from which they must wash their hearts. *Thoughts of iniquity or mischief*, these are the evil thoughts that are the spawn of the evil heart, from which all other wickedness is produced, Matt. xv. 19. These are our own, the conceptions of our own lusts (Jam. i. 15), and they are most dangerous when they lodge within us, when they are admitted and entertained as guests, and are suffered to continue. Some read it *thoughts of affliction*, such thoughts as will bring nothing but affliction and misery. Some by the vain thoughts here understand all those frivolous pleas and excuses with which they turned off the reproofs and calls of the word and rendered them ineffectual, and bolstered themselves up in their wickedness. *Wash thy heart from wickedness*, and think not to say, *We are not polluted* (ch. ii. 23), or, "*We are Jerusalem ; we have Abraham to our father*," Matt. iii. 8, 9.

19 My bowels, my bowels ! I am pained at my very heart ; my heart maketh a noise in me ; I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. 20 Destruction upon destruction is cried ; for the whole land is spoiled : suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment. 21 How long shall I see the standard, and hear the sound of the trumpet ? 22 For my people is foolish, they have not known me ; they are sottish children, and they have none understanding : they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge. 23 I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form, and void ; and the heavens, and they had no light. 24 I beheld the moun-

tains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. 25 I beheld, and, lo, *there was no man*, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. 26 I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful place *was a wilderness*, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the Lord, *and by his fierce anger*. 27 For thus hath the Lord said, The whole land shall be desolate; yet will I not make a full end. 28 For this shall the earth mourn, and the heavens above be black: because I have spoken *it*, I have purposed *it*, and will not repent, neither will I turn back from it. 29 The whole city shall flee for the noise of the horsemen and bowmen; they shall go into thickets, and climb up upon the rocks: every city *shall be forsaken*, and not a man dwell therein. 30 And *when thou art spoiled*, what wilt thou do? Though thou clothest thyself with crimson, though thou deckest thee with ornaments of gold, though thou rentest thy face with painting, in vain shalt thou make thyself fair; *thy lovers will despise thee*, they will seek thy life. 31 For I have heard a voice as of a woman in travail, *and the anguish as of her that bringeth forth her first child*, the voice of the daughter of Zion, *that bewaileth herself, that spreadeth her hands, saying*, Woe is me now! for my soul is wearied because of murderers.

The prophet is here in an agony, and cries out like one upon the rack of pain with some acute distemper, or as a woman in travail. The expressions are very pathetic and moving, enough to melt a heart of stone into compassion: *My bowels! my bowels! I am pained at my very heart*; and yet well, and in health himself, and nothing ails him. Note, A good man, in such a bad world as this is, cannot but be a man of sorrows. *My heart makes a noise in me*, through the tumult of my spirits, and *I cannot hold my peace*. Note, The grievance and the grief sometimes may be such that the most prudent patient man cannot forbear complaining.

Now, what is the matter? What is it that puts this good man into such agitation? It is not for himself, or any affliction in his family that he grieves thus; but it is purely upon the public account, it is his people's case that he lays to heart thus.

I. They are very sinful and will not be reformed, v. 22. These are the words of God himself, for so the prophet chose to give

this character of the people, rather than in his own words, or as from himself: *My people are foolish*. God calls them his people, though they are foolish. They have cast him off, but he has not cast them off, Rom. xi. 1. "They are *my people*, whom I have been in covenant with, and still have mercy in store for. They are *foolish*, for *they have not known me*." Note, Those are foolish indeed that have not known God, especially that call themselves his people, and have the advantages of coming into acquaintance with him, and yet have not known him. They are *sottish children*, stupid and senseless, and have *no understanding*. They cannot distinguish between truth and falsehood, good and evil; they cannot discern the mind of God either in his word or in his providence; they do not understand what their true interest is, nor on which side it lies. They are *wise to do evil*, to plot mischief against the quiet in the land, wise to contrive the gratification of their lusts, and then to conceal and palliate them. But *to do good they have no knowledge*, no contrivance, no application of mind; they know not how to make a good use either of the ordinances or of the providences of God, nor how to bring about any design for the good of their country. Contrary to this should be our character. Rom. xvi. 19, *I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil*.

II. They are very miserable, and cannot be relieved.

1. He cries out, *Because thou hast heard, O my soul! the sound of the trumpet, and seen the standard, both giving the alarm of war*, v. 19, 21. He does not say, *Thou hast heard*, O my ear! but, O my soul! because the event was yet future, and it is by the spirit of prophecy that he sees it and receives the impression of it. His soul heard it from the words of God, and therefore he was as well assured of it, and as much affected with it, as if he had heard it with his bodily ears. He expresses this deep concern, (1.) To show that, though he foretold this calamity, yet he was far from *desiring the woeful day*; for a woeful day it would be to him. It becomes us to tremble at the thoughts of the misery that sinners are running themselves into, though we have good hopes, through grace, that we ourselves are *delivered from the wrath to come*. (2.) To awaken them to a holy fear, and so to a care to prevent so great a judgment by a true and timely repentance. Note, Those that would affect others with the word of God should evidence that they are themselves affected with it. Now,

2. Let us see what there is in the destruction here foreseen and foretold that is so very affecting.

(1.) It is a swift and *sudden* destruction; it comes upon Judah and Jerusalem ere they are aware, and pours in so fast upon them that they have not the least breathing time.



They have no time to recollect their thoughts, much less to recruit or recover their strength: *Destruction upon destruction is cried* (v. 20), *breach upon breach*, one sad calamity, like Job's messengers, treading upon the heels of another. The death of Josiah breaks the ice, and plucks up the flood-gates; within three months after that his son and successor Jehoahaz is deposed by the king of Egypt; within two or three years after Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem and took it, and thenceforward he was continually making descents upon the land of Judah with his armies during the reigns of Jehoiakim, Jeconiah, and Zedekiah, till about nineteen years after he completed their ruin in the destruction of Jerusalem: but *suddenly were their tents spoiled and their curtains in a moment*. Though the cities held out for some time, the country was laid waste at the very first. The shepherds and all that lived in tents were plundered immediately; they and their effects fell into the enemies' hands; therefore we find the Rechabites, who dwelt in tents, upon the first coming of the army of the Chaldees into the land retiring to Jerusalem, Jer. xxxv. 11. The inhabitants of the villages soon ceased: *Suddenly were the tents spoiled*. The plain men that dwelt in tents were first made a prey of.

(2.) This dreadful war continued a great while, not in the borders, but in the bowels of the country; for the people were very obstinate, and would not submit to the king of Babylon, but took all opportunities to rebel against him, which did but lengthen out the calamity; they might as well have yielded at first as at last. This is complained of (v. 21): *How long shall I see the standard? Shall the sword devour for ever? Good men are none of those that delight in war, for they know not how to fish in troubled waters; they are for peace* (Ps. cxx. 7), and will heartily say *Amen* to that prayer, "Give peace in our time, O Lord!" *O thou sword of the Lord! when wilt thou be quiet?*

(3.) The desolations made by it in the land were general and universal: *The whole land is spoiled*, or plundered (v. 20); so it was at first, and at length it became a perfect chaos. It was such a desolation as amounted in a manner to a dissolution; not only the superstructure, but even the foundations, were all *out of course*. The prophet in vision saw the extent and extremity of this destruction, and he here gives a most lively description of it, which one would think might have made those uneasy in their sins who dwelt in a land doomed to such a ruin, which might yet have been prevented by their repentance. [1.] The earth is *without form, and void* (v. 23), as it was Gen. i. 2. It is *Tohu and Bohu*, the words there used, as far as the land of Judea goes. It is *confusion and emptiness*, stripped of all its beauty, void of all its wealth, and, compared with

what it was, every thing out of place and out of shape. To a worse chaos than this will the earth be reduced at the end of time, when it, and all the works that are therein, shall be burnt up. [2.] The heavens too are *without light*, as the earth is without fruits. This alludes to the darkness that was upon the face of the deep (Gen. i. 2), and represents God's displeasure against them, as the eclipse of the sun did at our Saviour's death. It was not only the earth that failed them, but heaven also frowned upon them; and with their trouble they had darkness, for they could not see through their troubles. The smoke of their houses and cities which the enemy burnt, and the dust which their army raised in its march, even darkened the sun, so that the heavens had no light. Or it may be taken figuratively: *The earth* (that is, the common people) was impoverished and in confusion; and the heavens (that is, the princes and rulers) had no light, no wisdom in themselves, nor were any comfort to the people, nor a guide to them. Comp. Matt. xxiv. 29. [3.] *The mountains trembled, and the hills moved lightly*, v. 24. So formidable were the appearances of God against his people, as in the days of old they had been for them, that the mountains skipped like rams and the little hills like lambs, Ps. cxiv. 4. The everlasting mountains seemed to be scattered, Hab. iii. 5. The mountains on which they had worshipped their idols, the mountains over which they had looked for succours, all trembled, as if they had been conscious of the people's guilt. The mountains, those among them that seemed to be highest and strongest, and of the firmest resolution, trembled at the approach of the Chaldean army. The hills moved lightly, as being eased of the burden of a *sinful nation*, Isa. i. 24. [4.] Not the earth only, but the air, was dispeopled, and left uninhabited (v. 25): *I beheld the cities, the countries that used to be populous, and, lo, there was no man to be seen; all the inhabitants were either killed, or fled, or taken captives, such a ruining depopulating thing is sin: nay, even the birds of the heavens, that used to fly about and sing among the branches, had now fled away, and were no more to be seen or heard. The land of Judah had now become like the lake of Sodom, over which (they say) no bird flies; see Deut. xxix. 23. The enemies shall make such havoc of the country that they shall not so much as leave a bird alive in it. [5.] Both the ground and the houses shall be laid waste* (v. 26): *Lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness*, being deserted by the inhabitants that should cultivate it, and then soon overgrown with thorns and briers, or being trodden down by the destroying army of the enemy. The cities also and their gates and walls are *broken down* and levelled with the ground. Those that look no further than second causes impute it to the policy and fury of the invaders;

but the prophet, who looks to the first cause, says that it is *at the presence of the Lord, at his face* (that is, the anger of his countenance), even *by his fierce anger*, that this was done. Even angry men cannot do us any real hurt, unless God be angry with us. If our ways please him, all is well. [6.] The meaning of all this is that the nation shall be entirely ruined, and every part of it shall share in the destruction; neither town nor country shall escape. *First*, Not the country, for *the whole land shall be desolate*, corn land and pasture land, both common and enclosed, it shall all be laid waste (v. 27); the conquerors will have occasion for it all. *Secondly*, Not the men, for (v. 29) *the whole city shall flee*, all the inhabitants of the town shall quit their habitations by consent, *for fear of the horsemen and bowmen*. Rather than lie exposed to their fury, they shall go into the thickets, where they are in danger of being torn by briars, nay, to be torn in pieces by wild beasts; and they shall climb up upon the rocks, where their lodging will be hard and cold, and the precipice dangerous. Let us not be over-fond of our houses and cities; for the time may come when rocks and thickets may be preferable, and chosen rather. This shall be the common case, for *every city shall be forsaken*, and *not a man shall be left that dares dwell therein*. Both government and trade shall be at an end, and all civil societies and incorporations dissolved. It is a very dismal idea which this gives of the approaching desolation; but in the midst of all these threatenings comes in one comfortable word (v. 27): *Yet will not I make a full end*—not a total consumption, for God will reserve a remnant to himself, that shall be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger—not a final consumption, for Jerusalem shall again be built and the land inhabited. This comes in here, in the midst of the threatenings, for the comfort of those that trembled at God's word; and it intimates to us the changeableness of God's providence; as it breaks down, so it raises up again; every end of our comforts is not a full end, however we may be ready to think it so. It also intimates the unchangeableness of God's covenant, which stands so firmly, that, though he may correct his people very severely, yet he will not cast them off, *ch. xxx. 11.*

(4.) Their case was helpless and without remedy. [1.] God would not help them; so he tells them plainly, v. 28. And, if the Lord do not help them, who can? This is that which makes their case deplorable: *"For this the earth mourns and the heavens above are black* (there are no prospects but what are very dismal), *because I have spoken it; I have given the word which shall not be called back; I have purposed it* (it is a consumption decreed, determined) *and I will not repent, not change this way, but proceed in it, and will not turn back from it."* They

would not repent and turn back from the way of their sins (*ch. ii. 25*), and therefore God will not repent and turn back from the way of his judgments. [2.] They could not help themselves, v. 30, 31. When the thing appeared at a distance they flattered themselves with hopes that, though God should not appear for them as he had done for Hezekiah against the Assyrian army, yet they should find some means or other to secure themselves and give check to the forces of the enemy. But the prophet tells them that, when it comes to the setting to, they will be quite at a loss: *"When thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do? What course wilt thou take? Sit down now, and consider this in time."* He assures them that, whatever were now their contrivances and confidences, *First*, They will then be despised by their allies whom they depended upon for assistance. He had often compared the sin of Jerusalem to whoredom, not only her idolatry, but her trust in creatures, in the neighbouring powers. Now here he compares her to a harlot abandoned by all the lewd ones that used to make court to her. She is supposed to do all she can to keep up her interest in their affections. She does what she can to make herself appear considerable among the nations, and a valuable ally. She compliments them by her ambassadors to the highest degree, to engage them to stand by her now in her distress. She *clothes herself with crimson*, as if she were rich, and *decks herself with ornaments of gold*, as if her treasures were still as full as ever they had been. She *rents her face with painting*, puts the best colours she can upon her present distresses and does her utmost to palliate and extenuate her losses, sets a good face upon them. But this painting, though it beautifies the face for the present, really rends it; the frequent use of paint spoils the skin, cracks it, and makes it rough; so the case which by false colours has been made to appear better than really it was, when truth comes to light, will look so much the worse. "And, after all, *in vain shalt thou make thyself fair*; all thy neighbours are sensible how low thou art brought; the Chaldeans will strip thee of thy crimson and ornaments, and then thy confederates will not only slight thee and refuse to give thee any succour, but they will join with those that seek thy life, that they may come in for a share in the prey of so rich a country." Here seems to be an allusion to the story of Jezebel, who thought, by making herself look fair and fine, to outface her doom, but in vain, 2 Kings ix. 30, 33. See what creatures prove when we confide in them, how treacherous they are; instead of saving the life, they seek the life; they often change, so that they will sooner do us an ill turn than any service. And see to how little purpose it is for those that have by sin deformed themselves in God's eyes to think by



any arts they can use to beautify themselves in the eye of the world. *Secondly*, They will then be themselves in despair; they will find their troubles to be like the pains of a woman in travail, which she cannot escape: *I have heard the voice of the daughter of Zion*, her groans echoing to the triumphant shouts of the Chaldean army, which he heard, *v. 15*. It is like the *voice of a woman in travail*, whose pain is exquisite, and the fruit of sin and the curse too (*Gen. iii. 16*), and extorts lamentable outcries, especially of a *woman in travail of her first child*, who, having never known before what that pain is, is the more terrified by it. Troubles are most grievous to those that have not been used to them. Zion, in this distress, since her neighbours refuse to pity her, *bewails herself*, fetching deep sighs (so the word signifies), and she *spreads her hands*, either wringing them for grief or reaching them forth for succour. All the cry is, *Woe is me now!* (now that the decree has gone forth against her and is past recall), for *my soul is wearied because of murderers*. The Chaldean soldiers put all to the sword that gave them any opposition, so that the land was full of murders. Zion was weary of hearing tragical stories from all parts of the country, and cried out, *Woe is me!* It was well if their sufferings put them in mind of their sins, the murders committed upon them of the murders committed by them; for God was now making inquisition for the *innocent blood* shed in Jerusalem, *which the Lord would not pardon*, 2 Kings xxiv. 4. Note, As sin will find out the sinner, so sorrow will, sooner or later, find out the secure.

## CHAP. V.

Reproofs for sin and threatenings of judgment are intermixed in this chapter, and are set the one over against the other: judgments are threatened, that the reproofs of sin might be the more effectual to bring them to repentance; sin is discovered, that God might be justified in the judgments threatened. I. The sins they are charged with are very great:—*injustice* (*ver. 1*), *hypocrisy* in religion (*ver. 2*), *incorrigibility* (*ver. 3*), the corruption and debauchery of both poor and rich (*ver. 4, 5*), *idolatry* and *adultery* (*ver. 7, 8*), *treacherous departures from God* (*ver. 11*), an *impudent defiance* of him (*ver. 12, 13*), and, that which is at the bottom of all this, *want of the fear of God*, notwithstanding the frequent calls given them to fear him, *ver. 20–24*. In the close of the chapter they are charged with *violence and oppression* (*ver. 25–28*), and a combination of those to debauch the nation who should have been active to reform it, *ver. 30, 31*. II. The judgments they are threatened with are very terrible. In general, they shall be reckoned with, *ver. 9, 29*. A foreign enemy shall be brought in upon them (*ver. 15–17*), shall set guards upon them (*ver. 6*), shall destroy their fortifications (*ver. 10*), shall carry them away into captivity (*ver. 19*), and keep all good things from them, *v. 25*. Herein the words of God's prophets shall be fulfilled, *v. 14*. But, III. Here is an intimation twice given that God would in the midst of wrath remember mercy, and not utterly destroy them, *ver. 10, 18*. This was the scope and purport of Jeremiah's preaching in the latter end of Josiah's reign and the beginning of Jehoiakim's; but the success of it did not answer expectation.

**R**UN ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be *any* that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it. 2 And though they say, The LORD liveth; surely

they swear falsely. 3 O LORD, are not thine eyes upon the truth? Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return. 4 Therefore I said, Surely these *are* poor; they are foolish: for they know not the way of the LORD, *nor* the judgment of their God. 5 I will get me unto the great men, and will speak unto them; for they have known the way of the LORD, *and* the judgment of their God: but these have altogether broken the yoke, *and* burst the bonds. 6 Wherefore a lion out of the forest shall slay them, *and* a wolf of the evenings shall spoil them, a leopard shall watch over their cities: every one that goeth out thence shall be torn in pieces: because their transgressions are many, *and* their backslidings are increased. 7 How shall I pardon thee for this? Thy children have forsaken me, and sworn by *them that are* no gods: when I had fed them to the full, they then committed adultery, and assembled themselves by troops in the harlots' houses. 8 They were *as* fed horses in the morning: every one neighed after his neighbour's wife. 9 Shall I not visit for these *things*? saith the LORD: and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?

Here is, I. A challenge to produce any one right honest man, or at least any considerable number of such, in Jerusalem, *v. 1*. Jerusalem had become like the old world, in which *all flesh had corrupted their way*. There were some perhaps who flattered themselves with hopes that there were yet many good men in Jerusalem, who would stand in the gap to turn away the wrath of God; and there might be others who boasted of its being the holy city and thought that this would save it. But God bids them search the town, and intimates that they should scarcely find a man in it who executed judgment and made conscience of what he said and did: "Look in the streets, where they make their appearance and converse together, and in the broad places, where they keep their markets; see if you can find a man, a magistrate (so some), that executeth judgment, and administers justice impartially, that will put the laws in execu-

tion against vice and profaneness." When the faithful thus cease and fail it is time to cry, *Woe is me!* (Mic. vii. 1, 2), high time to cry, *Help, Lord, Ps. xii. 1.* "If there be here and there a man that is truly conscientious, and does at least *speak the truth*, yet you shall not find him *in the streets and broad places*; he dares not appear publicly, lest he should be abused and run down. *Truth has fallen in the street* (Isa. lix. 14), and is forced to *seek for corners*." So pleasing would it be to God to find any such that for their sake he would pardon the city; if there were but ten righteous men in Sodom, if but one of a thousand, of ten thousand, in Jerusalem, it should be spared. See how ready God is to forgive, how swift to show mercy. But it might be said, "What do you make of those in Jerusalem that continue to make profession of religion and relation to God? Are not they men for whose sakes Jerusalem may be spared?" No, for they are not sincere in their profession (v. 2): *They say, The Lord liveth*, and will swear by his name only, but they *swear falsely*, that is, 1. They are not sincere in the profession they make of respect to God, but are false to him; they *honour him with their lips*, but *their hearts are far from him*. 2. Though they appeal to God only, they make no conscience of calling him to witness to a lie. Though they do not swear by idols, they forswear themselves, which is no less an affront to God, as the God of truth, than the other is as the only true God.

II. A complaint which the prophet makes to God of the obstinacy and wilfulness of these people. God had appealed to their eyes (v. 1); but here the prophet appeals to his eyes (v. 3): "*Are not thy eyes upon the truth?*" Dost thou not see every man's true character? And is not this the truth of their character, that *they have made their faces harder than a rock?*" Or, "*Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward part*; but where is it to be found among the men of this generation?" For though they say, *The Lord liveth*, yet they never regard him; *thou hast stricken them* with one affliction after another, *but they have not grieved* for the affliction, they have been as stocks and stones under it, much less have they grieved for the sin by which they have brought it upon themselves. *Thou hast gone further yet, hast consumed them*, hast corrected them yet more severely; *but they have refused to receive correction*, to accommodate themselves to thy design in correcting them and to answer to it. They would not receive instruction by the correction. They have set themselves to outface the divine sentence and to outbrave the execution of it, for *they have made their faces harder than a rock*; they cannot change countenance, neither blush for shame nor look pale for fear, cannot be beaten back from the pursuit of their lusts, whatever check is given them.

for, though often called to it, *they have refused to return*, and would go forward, right or wrong, *as the horse into the battle*."

III. The trial made both of rich and poor, and the bad character given of both.

1. The poor were ignorant, and therefore they were wicked. He found many that *refused to return*, for whom he was willing to make the best excuse their case would bear, and it was this (v. 4): "*Surely, these are poor, they are foolish*. They never had the advantage of a good education, nor have they wherewithal to help themselves now with the means of instruction. They are forced to work hard for their living, and have no time nor capacity for reading or hearing, so that *they know not the way of the Lord, nor the judgments of their God*; they understand neither the way in which God by his precept will have them to walk towards him nor the way in which he by his providence is walking towards them." Note, (1.) Prevailing ignorance is the lamentable cause of abounding impiety and iniquity. What can one expect but works of darkness from brutish sottish people that know nothing of God and religion, but choose to *sit in darkness*? (2.) This is commonly a reigning sin among poor people. There are the devil's poor as well as God's, who, notwithstanding their poverty, might *know the way of the Lord*, so as to walk in it and do their duty, without being book-learning; but they are willingly ignorant, and therefore their ignorance will not be their excuse.

2. The rich were insolent and haughty, and therefore they were wicked (v. 5): "*I will get me to the great men*, and see if I can find them more pliable to the word and providence of God. I will *speak to them*, preach at court, in hopes to make some impression upon men of polite literature. But all in vain; for, though *they know the way of the Lord and the judgment of their God*, yet they are too stiff to stoop to his government: *These have altogether broken the yoke and burst the bonds*. They know their Master's will, but are resolved to have their own will, to *walk in the way of their heart and in the sight of their eyes*. They think themselves too goodly to be controlled, too big to be corrected, even by the sovereign Lord of all himself. They are for breaking even *his bands asunder*, Ps. ii. 3. The poor are weak, the rich are wilful, and so neither do their duty."

IV. Some particular sins specified, which they were most notoriously guilty of, and which cried most loudly to heaven for vengeance. *Their transgressions indeed were many*, of many kinds and often repeated, *and their backslidings were increased*; they added to the number of them and grew more and more impudent in them, v. 6. But two sins especially were justly to be looked upon as unpardonable crimes:—1. Their spiritual whoredom, giving that ho-



nour to idols which is due to God only. "*Thy children have forsaken me, to whom they were born and dedicated and under whom they have been brought up, and they have sworn by those that are no gods, have made their appeal to them as if they had been omniscient and their proper judges.*" This is here put for all acts of religious worship due to God only, but with which they had honoured their idols. *They have sworn to them* (so it may be read), *have joined themselves to them and covenanted with them.* Those that forsake God make a bad change for those that are no gods. 2. Their corporal whoredom. Because they had forsaken God and served idols, he gave them up to vile affections; and those that dishonoured him were left to dishonour themselves and their own families. *They committed adultery most scandalously, without sense of shame or fear of punishment, for they assembled themselves by troops in the harlots' houses and did not blush to be seen by one another in the most scandalous places.* So impudent and violent was their lust, so impatient of check, and so eager to be gratified, that they became perfect beasts (v. 8); like high-fed horses, they *neighed every one after his neighbour's wife, v. 8.* Unbridled lusts make men like natural brute beasts, such monstrous odious things are they. And that which aggravated their sin was that it was the abuse of God's favours to them: *When they were fed to the full, then their lusts grew thus furious. Fulness of bread was fuel to the fire of Sodom's lusts. Sine Cerere et Baccho friget Venus—Luxurious living feeds the flame of lust.* Fasting would help to tame the unruly evil that is so full of deadly poison, and bring the body into subjection.

V. A threatening of God's wrath against them for their wickedness and the universal debauchery of their land.

1. The particular judgment that is threatened, v. 6. A foreign enemy shall break in upon them, get dominion over them, and shall lay all waste: their country shall be as if it were overrun and perfectly mastered by wild beasts. This enemy shall be, (1.) Like a lion of the forest, so strong, so furious, so irresistible; and he shall slay them. (2.) Like a wolf of the evening, which comes out at night, when he is hungry, to seek his prey, and is very fierce and ravenous: and the noise both of the lions' roaring and of the wolves' howling is very hideous. (3.) Like a leopard, which is very swift and very cruel, and withal careful not to miss his prey. The army of the enemy shall watch over their cities so strictly as to put the inhabitants to this sad dilemma—if they stay in, they are starved; if they stir out, they are stabbed: *Every one that goeth out thence shall be torn in pieces, which intimates that in many places the enemy gave no quarter. And all this bloody work is owing to the multitude*

*of their transgressions.* It is sin that makes the great slaughter.

2. An appeal to themselves concerning the equity of it (v. 9): "*Shall I not visit for these things?*" Can you yourselves think that the God whose name is *Jealous* will let such idolatries go unpunished, or that a God of infinite purity will connive at such abominable uncleanness?" These are things that must be reckoned for, else the honour of God's government cannot be maintained, nor his laws saved from contempt; but sinners will be tempted to think him altogether such a one as themselves, contrary to that conviction of their own consciences concerning the judgment of God which is necessary to be supported, *That those who do such things are worthy of death, Rom. i. 32.* Observe, When God punishes sin, he is said to visit for it, or enquire into it; for he weighs the cause before he passes sentence. Sinners have reason to expect punishment upon the account of God's holiness, to which sin is highly offensive, as well as upon the account of his justice, to which it renders us obnoxious; this is intimated in that, *Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?* It is not only the word of God, but his soul, that takes vengeance. And he has national judgments wherewith to take vengeance for national sins. *Such nations as this* was cannot long go unpunished. *How shall I pardon thee for this?* v. 7. Not but that those who have been guilty of these sins have found mercy with God, as to their eternal state (Manasseh himself did, though so much accessory to the iniquity of these times); but nations, as such, being rewardable and punishable only in this life, it would not be for the glory of God to let a nation so very wicked as this pass without some manifest tokens of his displeasure.

10 Go ye up upon her walls, and destroy; but make not a full end: take away her battlements; for they are not the LORD's. 11 For the house of Israel and the house of Judah have dealt very treacherously against me, saith the LORD. 12 They have belied the LORD, and said, *It is not he; neither shall evil come upon us; neither shall we see sword nor famine:* 13 And the prophets shall become wind, and the word is not in them; thus shall it be done unto them. 14 Wherefore thus saith the LORD God of hosts, Because ye speak this word, behold, I will make my words in thy mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them. 15 Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far, O house of Israel, saith the LORD:

it *is* a mighty nation, it *is* an ancient nation, a nation whose language thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say. 16 Their quiver *is* as an open sepulchre, they *are* all mighty men. 17 And they shall eat up thine harvest, and thy bread, *which* thy sons and thy daughters should eat: they shall eat up thy flocks and thine herds: they shall eat up thy vines and thy fig-trees: they shall impoverish thy fenced cities, wherein thou trustedst, with the sword. 18 Nevertheless in those days, saith the LORD, I will not make a full end with you. 19 And it shall come to pass, when ye shall say, Wherefore doeth the LORD our God all these *things* unto us? then shalt thou answer them, Like as ye have forsaken me, and served strange gods in your land, so shall ye serve strangers in a land *that is* not your's.

We may observe in these verses, as before,

I. The sin of this people, upon which the commission signed against them is grounded. God disowns them and dooms them to destruction, v. 10. But *is there not a cause?* Yes; for, 1. They have deserted the law of God (v. 11): *The house of Israel and the house of Judah*, though at variance with one another, yet both agreed to *deal very treacherously against God*. They forsook the worship of him, and therein violated their covenants with him; they revolted from him, and played the hypocrite with him. 2. They have defied the judgments of God and given the lie to his threatenings in the mouth of his prophets, v. 12, 13. They were often told that evil would certainly come upon them; they must expect some desolating judgment, *sword or famine*; but they were secure, and said, *We shall have peace, though we go on*. For, (1.) They did not fear what God is. They belied him, and confronted the dictates even of natural light concerning him; for they said, "*It is not he*, that is, he is not such a one as we have been made to believe he is; he does not see, or not regard, or will not require it; and therefore *no evil shall come upon us*." Multitudes are ruined by being made to believe that God will not be so strict with them as his word says he will; nay, by this artifice Satan undid us all: *You shall not surely die*. So here: *Neither shall we see sword nor famine*. Vain hopes of impunity are the deceitful support of all impiety. (2.) They did not fear what God said. The prophets gave them fair warning, but they turned it off with a jest: "They do but talk so, because it is their trade; they are words of course, and words are but wind. It is not the word of the

Lord that is in them; it is only the language of their melancholy fancy or their ill-will to their country, because they are not preferred." Note, Impenitent sinners are not willing to own any thing to be the word of God that makes against them, that tends either to part them from, or disquiet them in, their sins. They threaten the prophets: "*They shall become wind*, shall pass away unregarded, and *thus shall it be done unto them*; what they threaten against us we will inflict upon them. Do they frighten us with famine? Let them be *fed with the bread of affliction*." So Micaiah was, 1 Kings xxii. 27. "Do they tell us of the sword? Let them perish by the sword," ch. ii. 30. Thus their mocking and misusing God's messengers filled the measure of their iniquity.

II. The punishment of this people for their sin. 1. The threatenings they laughed at shall be executed (v. 14): *Because you speak this word* of contempt concerning the prophets, and the word in their mouths, therefore God will put honour upon them and their words, for not one iota or tittle of them shall *fall to the ground*, 1 Sam. iii. 19. Here God turns to the prophet Jeremiah, who had been thus bantered, and perhaps had been a little uneasy at it: *Behold, I will make my words in thy mouth fire*. God owns them for his words, though men denied them, and will as surely make them to take effect as the fire consumes combustible matter that is in its way. *The word shall be fire and the people wood*. Sinners by sin make themselves fuel to that wrath of God which is *revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men* in the scripture. The word of God will certainly be too hard for those that contend with it. Those shall break who will not bow before it. 2. The enemy they thought themselves in no danger of shall be brought upon them. God gives them their commission (v. 10): "*Go you up upon her walls*, mount them, trample upon them, tread them down. Walls of stone, before the divine commission, shall be but mud walls. Having made yourselves masters of the walls, you may *destroy* at pleasure. You may *take away her battlements*, and leave the fenced fortified cities to lie open; for her battlements *are not the Lord's*; he does not own them and therefore will not protect and fortify them." They were not erected in his fear, nor with a dependence upon him; the people have trusted to them more than to God, and therefore they are not his. When the city is filled with sin God will not patronise the fortifications of it, and then they are paper walls. What can defend us when he who is our defence, and the defender of all our defences, has *departed from us*? Num. xiv. 9. What is not of God cannot stand, not stand long, nor stand us in any stead. What dreadful work these invaders should make is here described (v. 15): *Lo, I will bring a nation upon you, O*



*house of Israel!* Note, God has all nations at his command, does what he pleases with them and makes what use he pleases of them. And sometimes he is pleased to make the nations of the earth, the heathen nations, a scourge to the house of Israel, when that has become a *hypocritical nation*. This nation of the Chaldeans is here said to be a remote nation; it is *brought upon them from afar*, and therefore will make the greater spoil and the longer stay, that the soldiers may pay themselves well for so long a march. "It is a nation that thou hast had no commerce with, by reason of their distance, and therefore canst not expect to find favour with." God can bring trouble upon us from places and causes very remote. It is a *mighty nation*, that there is no making head against, an *ancient nation*, that value themselves upon their antiquity and will therefore be the more haughty and imperious. It is a *nation whose language thou knowest not*; they spoke the Syriac tongue, which the Jews at that time were not acquainted with, as appears, 2 Kings xviii. 26. The difference of language would make it the more difficult to treat with them of peace. Compare this with the threatening, Deut. xxviii. 49, which it seems to have a reference to, for the law and the prophets exactly agree. They are well armed: *Their quiver is as an open sepulchre*; their arrows shall fly so thick, hit so sure, and wound so deep, that they shall be reckoned to breathe nothing but death and slaughter: they are able-bodied, all effective, *mighty men*, v. 16. And, when they have made themselves masters of the country, they shall devour all before them, and reckon all their own that they can lay their hands on, v. 17. (1.) They shall strip the country, shall not only sustain, but surfeit, their soldiers with the rich products of this fruitful land. "They shall not store up (then it might possibly be retrieved), but *eat up thy harvest* in the field and *thy bread* in the house, *which thy sons and thy daughters should eat*." Note, What we have we have for our families, and it is a comfort to see our sons and daughters eating that which we have taken care and pains for. But it is a grievous vexation to see it devoured by strangers and enemies, to see their camps victualled with our stores, while those that are dear to us are perishing for want of it: this also is according to the curse of the law, Deut. xxviii. 33. "They shall eat up thy flocks and herds, out of which thou hast taken sacrifices for thy idols; they shall not leave thee the fruit of thy vines and fig-trees." (2.) They shall starve the towns: "They shall impoverish thy fenced cities" (and what fence is there against poverty, when it comes like an armed man?), "those cities wherein thou trustedst to be a protection to the country." Note, It is just with God to impoverish that which we make our confidence. They shall

impoverish them *with the sword*, cutting off all provisions from coming to them and intercepting trade and commerce, which will impoverish even fenced cities.

III. An intimation of the tender compassion God has yet for them. The enemy is commissioned to destroy and lay waste, but must not *make a full end*, v. 10. Though they make a great slaughter, yet some must be left to live; though they make a great spoil, yet something must be left to live upon, for God has said it (v. 18) with a *non obstante*—*a nevertheless* to the present desolation: "Even in those days, dismal as they are, *I will not make a full end with you*;" and, if God will not, the enemy shall not. God has mercy in store for this people, and therefore will set bounds to this desolating judgment. *Hitherto it shall come, and no further*.

IV. The justification of God in these proceedings against them. As he will appear to be gracious in not making a full end with them, so he will appear to be righteous in coming so near it, and will have it acknowledged that he has done them no wrong, v. 19. Observe, 1. A reason demanded, insolently demanded, by the people for these judgments. They will say, "Wherefore doth the Lord our God do all this unto us? What provocation have we given him, or what quarrel has he with us?" As if against such a sinful nation there did not appear cause enough of action. Note, Unhumbled hearts are ready to charge God with injustice in their afflictions, and pretend they have to seek for the cause of them when it is written in the forehead of them. But, 2. Here is a reason immediately assigned. The prophet is instructed what answer to give them; for God will be justified when he speaks, though he speaks with ever so much terror. He must tell them that God does this against them for what they have done against him, and that they may, if they please, read their sin in their punishment. Do not they know very well that they have *forsaken God*, and therefore can they think it strange if he has forsaken them? Have they forgotten how often they served *strange gods in their own land*, that good land, in the abundance of the fruits of which they ought to have served God with gladness of heart? and therefore is it not just with God to make them serve *strangers* in a strange land, where they can call nothing their own, as he has threatened to do? Deut. xxviii. 47, 48. Those that are fond of strangers, to strangers let them go.

20 Declare this in the house of Jacob, and publish it in Judah, saying, 21 Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not: 22 Fear ye not me? saith the LORD: will ye not tremble at my presence, which have

placed the sand *for* the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it? 23 But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone. 24 Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the LORD our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest.

The prophet, having reproved them for sin and threatened the judgments of God against them, is here sent to them again upon another errand, which he must *publish in Judah*; the purport of it is to persuade them to fear God, which would be an effectual principle of their reformation, as the want of that fear had been at the bottom of their apostasy.

I. He complains of the shameful stupidity of this people, and their bent to backslide from God, speaking as if he knew not what course to take with them. For,

1. Their understandings were darkened and unapt to admit the rays of the divine light: They are a *foolish people and without understanding*; they apprehend not the mind of God, though ever so plainly declared to them by the written word, by his prophets, and by his providence (v. 21): *They have eyes, but they see not, ears, but they hear not*, like the idols which they made and worshipped, Ps. cxv. 5, 6, 8. One would have thought that they took notice of things, but really they did not; they had intellectual faculties and capacities, but they did not employ and improve them as they ought. Herein they disappointed the expectations of all their neighbours, who, observing what excellent means of knowledge they had, concluded, *Surely they are a wise and an understanding people* (Deut. iv. 6), and yet really they are a *foolish people and without understanding*. Note, We cannot judge of men by the advantages and opportunities they enjoy: there are those that sit in darkness in a land of light, that live in sin even in a holy land, that are bad in the best places. 2. Their wills were stubborn and unapt to submit to the rules of the divine law (v. 23): *This people has a revolting and a rebellious heart*; and no wonder when they were *foolish and without understanding*, Ps. lxxxii. 5. Nay, it is the corrupt bias of the will that bribes and besots the understanding: none so blind as those that will not see. The character of this people is the true character of all people by nature, till the grace of God has wrought a change. We

are *foolish*, slow of understanding, and apt to mistake and forget; yet that is not the worst. We have a *revolting and a rebellious heart*, a carnal mind, that is enmity against God and is not in subjection to his law, not only revolting from him by a rooted aversion to that which is good, but rebellious against him by a strong inclination to that which is evil. Observe, The revolting heart is a rebellious one: those that withdraw from their allegiance to God do not stop there, but by siding in with sin and Satan take up arms against him. *They have revolted and gone*. The revolting heart will produce a revolting life. *They are gone, and they will go* (so it may be read); *now nothing will be restrained from them*, Gen. xi. 6.

II. He ascribed this to the want of the fear of God. When he observes them to be without understanding he asks, "*Fear you not me, saith the Lord, and will you not tremble at my presence?*" v. 22. If you would but keep up an awe of God, you would be more observant of what he says to you; and, did you but understand your own interest better, you would be more under the commanding rule of God's fear." When he observes that *they have revolted and gone* he adds this, as the root and cause of their apostasy (v. 24), *Neither say they in their hearts, Let us now fear the Lord our God*. Therefore so many bad thoughts come into their mind, and hurry them to that which is evil, because they will not admit and entertain good thoughts, and particularly not this good thought, *Let us now fear the Lord our God*. It is true it is God's work to put his fear into our hearts; but it is our work to stir up ourselves to fear him, and to fasten upon those considerations which are proper to affect us with a holy awe of him; and it is because we do not do this that our hearts are so destitute of his fear as they are, and so apt to revolt and rebel.

III. He suggests some of those things which are proper to possess us with a holy fear of God.

1. We must fear the Lord and his greatness, v. 22. Upon this account he demands our fear: *Shall we not tremble at his presence*, and be afraid of affronting him, or trifling with him, who in the kingdom of nature and providence gives such incontestable proofs of his almighty power and sovereign dominion? Here is one instance given of very many that might be given: he keeps the sea within compass. Though the tides flow with a mighty strength twice every day, and if they should flow on awhile would drown the world, though in a storm the billows rise high and dash to the shore with incredible force and fury, yet they are under check, they return, they retire, and no harm is done. *This is the Lord's doing*, and, if it were not common, it would be *marvellous in our eyes*. He has *placed the sand for the bound of the sea*, not only for a *meer-stone*,



to mark out how far it may come and where it must stop, but as a *mound*, or fence, to put a stop to it. A wall of sand shall be as effectual as a wall of brass to check the flowing waves, when God is pleased to make it so; nay, that is chosen rather, to teach us that a *soft answer*, like the soft sand, *turns away wrath*, and quiets a foaming rage, when *grievous words*, like hard rocks, do but exasperate, and make the *waters cast forth* so much the more *mire and dirt*. This bound is placed by a *perpetual decree*, by an ordinance of *antiquity* (so some read it), and then it sends us as far back as to the creation of the world, when God divided between the sea and the dry land, and fixed marches between them, Gen. i. 9, 10 (which is elegantly described, Ps. civ. 6, &c., and Job xxxviii. 8, &c.), or to the period of Noah's flood, when God promised that he would never drown the world again, Gen. ix. 11. An ordinance of *perpetuity*—so our translation takes it. It is a *perpetual decree*; it has had its effect all along to this day and shall still continue till day and night come to an end. This *perpetual decree* the waters of the sea cannot pass over nor break through. *Though the waves thereof toss themselves*, as the troubled sea does when it cannot rest, yet can they not prevail; *though they roar and rage* as if they were vexed at the check given them, yet can they not pass over. Now this is a good reason why we should fear God; for, (1.) By this we see that he is a God of almighty power and universal sovereignty, and therefore to be feared and had in reverence. (2.) This shows us how easily he could drown the world again and how much we continually lie at his mercy, and therefore we should be afraid of making him our enemy. (3.) Even the unruly waves of the sea observe his decree and retreat at his check, and shall not we then? Why are our hearts revolting and rebellious, when the sea neither revolts nor rebels?

2. We must fear the Lord and his goodness, Hos. iii. 5. The instances of this, as of the former, are fetched from God's common providence, v. 24. We must *fear the Lord our God*, that is, we must worship him, and give him glory, and be always in care to keep ourselves in his love, because he is continually doing us good: he gives us both *the former and the latter rain*, the former a little after seed-time, the latter a little before harvest, and both in *their season*; and by this means *he reserves to us the appointed weeks of harvest*. Harvest is reckoned by weeks, because in a few weeks enough is gathered to serve for sustenance the year round. The weeks of the harvest are appointed us by the promise of God, that *seed-time and harvest shall not fail*. And in performance of that promise they are reserved to us by the divine providence, otherwise we should come short of them. In harvest mercies therefore God is to be acknowledged, his power, and goodness, and

faithfulness, for they all come from him. And it is a good reason why we should fear him, that we may keep ourselves in his love, because we have such a necessary dependence upon him. The fruitful seasons were witness for God, even to the heathen world, sufficient to leave them inexcusable in their contempt of him (Acts xiv. 17); and yet the Jews, who had the written word to explain their testimony by, were not wrought upon to fear the Lord, though it appears how much it is our interest to do so.

25 Your iniquities have turned away these *things*, and your sins have withholden good *things* from you. 26 For among my people are found wicked *men*: they lay wait, as he that setteth snares; they set a trap, they catch men. 27 As a cage is full of birds, so *are* their houses full of deceit: therefore they are become great, and waxen rich. 28 They are waxen fat, they shine: yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked: they judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper; and the right of the needy do they not judge. 29 Shall I not visit for these *things*? saith the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? 30 A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; 31 The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to *have it so*: and what will ye do in the end thereof?

Here, I. The prophet shows them what mischief their sins had done them: They *have turned away these things* (v. 25), the former and the latter rain, which they used to have in *due season* (v. 24), but which had of late been withheld (ch. iii. 3), by reason of which the appointed weeks of harvest had sometimes disappointed them. "It is *your sin* that has withholden good from you, when God was ready to bestow it upon you." Note, It is sin that stops the current of God's favours to us, and deprives us of the blessings we used to receive. It is that which makes the heavens as brass and the earth as iron.

II. He shows them how great their sins were, how heinous and provoking. When they had forsaken the worship of the true God, even moral honesty was lost among them: *Among my people are found wicked men* (v. 26), some of the worst of men, and so much the worse they were for being found among God's people. 1. They were spiteful and malicious. Such are properly *wicked men*, men that delight in doing mischief. They were *found* (that is, caught) in

the very act of their wickedness. As hunters or fowlers lay snares for their game, so did they lie in wait to catch men, and made a sport of it, and took as much pleasure in it as if they had been entrapping beasts or birds. They contrived ways of doing mischief to good people (whom they hated for their goodness), especially to those that faithfully reproved them (Isa. xxix. 21), or to those that stood in the way of their pre-ferment or whom they supposed to have affronted them or done them a diskindness, or to those whose estates they coveted; so Jezebel ensnared Naboth for his vineyard. Nay, they did mischief for mischief sake. 2. They were false and treacherous (v. 27): "*As a cage, or coop, is full of birds, and of food for them to fatten them for the table, so are their houses full of deceit, of wealth obtained by fraudulent practices or of arts and methods of defrauding. All the business of their families is done with deceit; whoever deals with them, they will cheat him if they can, which is easily done by those who make no conscience of what they say and do. Herein they overpass the deeds of the wicked, v. 28. Those that act by deceit, with a colour of law and justice, do more mischief perhaps than those wicked men (v. 26) that carry all before them by open force and violence; or they are worse than the heathen themselves, yea, the worst of them. And (would you think it?) they prosper in these wicked courses and therefore their hearts are hardened in them. They are greedy of the world, because they find it flows in upon them, and they stick not at any wickedness in pursuit of it, because they find that it is so far from hindering their prosperity that it furthers it: They have become great in the world; they have waxen rich, and thrive upon it. They have where-withal to make provision for the flesh to fulfil all the lusts of it, to which they are very indulgent, so that they have waxen fat with living at ease and bathing themselves in all the delights of sense. They are sleek and smooth: They shine; they look fair and gay; every body admires them. And they pass by matters of evil (so some read the following words); they escape the evils which one would expect their sins should bring upon them; they are not in trouble as other men, much less as we might expect bad men.*" Ps. lxxiii. 5, &c. 3. When they had grown great, and had got power in their hands, they did not do that good with it which they ought to have done: *They judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, and the right of the needy.* The fatherless are often needy, always need assistance and advice, and advantage is taken of their helpless condition to do them an injury. Who should succour them then but the great and rich? What have men wealth for but to do good with it? But these would take no cognizance of any such distressed cases: they

had not so much sense of justice, or compassion for the injured; or, if they did concern themselves in the cause, it was not to do right, but to protect those that did wrong. And yet they prosper still; *God layeth not folly to them.* Certainly then the things of this world are not the best things, for oftentimes the worst men have the most of them; yet we are not to think that, because they prosper, God allows of their practices. No; *though sentence against their evil works be not executed speedily, it will be executed.* 4. There was a general corruption of all orders and degrees of men among them (v. 30, 31). *A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land.* The degeneracy of such a people, so privileged and advanced, was a wonderful thing, and to be viewed with amazement. How could they ever break through so many obligations? It was a horrible thing, a thing to be detested and the consequences of it dreaded. To frighten ourselves from sin, let us call it a horrible thing. What was the matter? In short, this: (1.) The leaders misled the people: *The prophets prophesy falsely, counterfeit a commission from heaven when they are factors for hell. Religion is never more dangerously attacked than under colour and pretence of divine revelation. But why did not the priests, who had power in their hands for that purpose, restrain these false prophets? Alas! instead of doing that they made use of them as the tools of their ambition and tyranny: The priests bear rule by their means; they supported themselves in their grandeur and wealth, their laziness and luxury, their impositions and oppressions, by the help of the false prophets and their interest in the people. Thus they were in a combination against every thing that was good, and strengthened one another's hands in evil.* (2.) The people were well enough pleased to be so misled: "*They are my people,*" says God, "*and should have stood up for me, and borne their testimony against the wickedness of their priests and prophets; but they love to have it so.*" If the priests and prophets will let them alone in their sins, they will give them no disturbance in theirs. They love to be ridden with a loose rein, and like those rulers very well that will not restrain their lusts and those teachers that will not reprove them.

III. He shows them how fatal the consequences of this would certainly be. Let them consider,

1. What the reckoning would be for their wickedness (v. 29): *Shall not I visit for these things?* as before, v. 9. Sometimes mercy rejoices against judgment: *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?* Here, judgment is reasoning against mercy: *Shall I not visit?* We are sure that Infinite Wisdom knows how to accommodate the matter between them. The manner of expression is very emphatic, and denotes, (1.) The certainty



and necessity of God's judgments: *Shall not my soul be avenged?* Yes, without doubt, vengeance will come, it must come, if the sinner repent not. (2.) The justice and equity of God's judgments; he appeals to the sinner's own conscience, Do not those deserve to be punished that have been guilty of such abominations? Shall he not be avenged on *such a nation*, such a wicked provoking nation as this?

2. What the direct tendency of their wickedness was: *What will you do in the end thereof?* That is, (1.) "What a pitch of wickedness will you come to at last! *What will you do?* What will you not do that is base and wicked? What will this grow to? You will certainly grow worse and worse, till you have filled up the measure of your iniquity." (2.) "What a pit of destruction will you come to at last! When things are brought to such a pass as this, as nothing can be expected from you but a deluge of sin, so nothing can be expected from God but a deluge of wrath; and what will you do when that shall come?" Note, Those that walk in bad ways would do well to consider the tendency of them both to greater sin and utter ruin. An end will come; the end of a wicked life will come, when it will be all called over again, and without doubt will be bitterness in the latter end.

## CHAP. VI.

In this chapter, as before, we have, I. A prophecy of the invading of the land of Judah and the besieging of Jerusalem by the Chaldean army (ver. 1-6), with the spoils they should make of the country (ver. 9) and the terror which all should be seized with on that occasion, ver. 22-25. II. An account of those sins of Judah and Jerusalem which provoked God to bring this desolating judgment upon them. Their oppression (ver. 7), their contempt of the word of God (ver. 10-12), their worldliness (ver. 13), the treachery of their prophets (ver. 14), their impudence in sin (ver. 15), their obstinacy against reproofs (ver. 18, 19), which made their sacrifices unacceptable to him (ver. 20), and for which he gave them up to ruin (ver. 21), but tried them first (ver. 27) and then rejected them as irreclaimable, ver. 28-30. III. Good counsel given them in the midst of all this, ver. 1, 8, 16, 17.

**O** YE children of Benjamin, gather yourselves to flee out of the midst of Jerusalem, and blow the trumpet in Tekoa, and set up a sign of fire in Beth-haccerem: for evil appeareth out of the north, and great destruction. 2 I have likened the daughter of Zion to a comely and delicate woman. 3 The shepherds with their flocks shall come unto her; they shall pitch *their* tents against her round about; they shall feed every one in his place. 4 Prepare ye war against her; arise, and let us go up at noon. Woe unto us! for the day goeth away, for the shadows of the evening are stretched out. 5 Arise, and let us go by night, and let us destroy her palaces. 6 For thus hath the LORD of hosts said, Hew ye

down trees, and cast a mount against Jerusalem: this *is* the city to be visited; she *is* wholly oppression in the midst of her. 7 As a fountain casteth out her waters, so she casteth out her wickedness: violence and spoil is heard in her; before me continually *is* grief and wounds. 8 Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee; lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited.

Here is, I. Judgment threatened against Judah and Jerusalem. The city and the country were at this time secure and under no apprehension of danger; they saw no cloud gathering, but every thing looked safe and serene: but the prophet tells them that they shall shortly be invaded by a foreign power, an army shall be brought against them *from the north*, which shall lay all waste, and shall cause not only a general consternation, but a general desolation. It is here foretold,

1. That the alarm of this should be loud and terrible. This is represented, v. 1. The children of Benjamin, in which tribe part of Jerusalem lay, are here called to shift for their own safety in the country; for the city (to which it was first thought advisable for them to flee, *ch.* iv. 5, 6) would soon be made too hot for them, and they would find it the wisest course to flee out of the midst of it. It is common, in public frights, for people to think any place safer than that in which they are; and therefore those in the city are for shifting into the country, in hopes there to escape out of danger, and those in the country are for shifting into the city, in hopes there to make head against the danger; but it is all in vain when evil pursues sinners with commission. They are told to send the alarm into the country, and to do what they can for their own safety: *Blow the trumpet in Tekoa*, a city which lay twelve miles north from Jerusalem. Let them be stirred up to stand upon their guard: *Set up a sign of fire* (that is, kindle the beacons) *in Beth-haccerem*, the *house of the vineyard*, which lay on a hill between Jerusalem and Tekoa. Prepare to make a vigorous resistance, *for the evil appears out of the north*. This may be taken ironically: "Be-take yourselves to the best methods you can think of for your own preservation, but all shall be in vain; for, when you have done your best, it will be a great destruction, for it is in vain to contend with God's judgments."

2. That the attempt upon them should be bold and formidable, and such as they should be a very unequal match for. (1.) See what *the daughter of Zion* is, on whom the assault is made. She is compared to a *comely and delicate woman* (v. 2), bred up in every thing that is nice and soft, that will not set

so much as the sole of her foot to the ground for tenderness and delicacy (Deut. xxviii. 56), nor suffer the wind to blow upon her; and, not being accustomed to hardship, she will be the less able either to resist the enemy (for those that make war must endure hardness) or to bear the destruction with that patience which is necessary to make it tolerable. The more we indulge ourselves in the pleasures of this life the more we disfit ourselves for the troubles of this life. (2.) See what the daughter of Babylon is, by whom the assault is made. The generals and their armies are compared to *shepherds* and *their flocks* (v. 3), in such numbers and in such order did they come, the soldiers following their leaders as the sheep their shepherds. The daughter of Zion dwelt at home (so some read it), expecting to be courted with love, but was invaded with fury. This comparing of the enemies to shepherds inclines me to embrace another reading, which some give of v. 2, *The daughter of Zion is like a comely pasture-ground and a delicate land*, which invite the shepherds to bring their flocks thither to graze; and as the shepherds easily make themselves masters of an open field, which (as was then usual in some parts) lies common, owned by none, *pitch their tents* in it, and their flocks quickly eat it bare, so shall the Chaldean army easily break in upon the land of Judah, force for themselves a free quarter where they please, and in a little time devour all. For the further illustration of this he shows, [1.] How God shall commission them to make this destruction even of the holy land and the holy city, which were his own possession. It is he that says (v. 4), *Prepare you war against her*; for he is the Lord of hosts, that has all hosts at his command, and he has said (v. 6), *Hew you down trees, and cast a mount against Jerusalem*, in order to the attacking of it. The Chaldeans have great power against Judah and Jerusalem, and yet they have no power but what is given them from above. God has marked out Jerusalem for destruction. He has said, *"This is the city to be visited"*, visited in wrath, visited by the divine justice, and this is the time of her visitation." The day is coming when those that are careless and secure in sinful ways will certainly be visited. [2.] How they shall animate themselves and one another to execute that commission. God's counsels being against Jerusalem, which cannot be altered or disannulled, the councils of war which the enemies held are made to agree with his counsels. God having said, *Prepare war against her*, their determinations are made subservient to his; and, notwithstanding the distance of place and the many difficulties that lay in the way, it is soon resolved, *nemine contradicente—unanimously*. *Arise, and let us go*. Note, It is good to see how the counsel and decree of God are pursued and executed in the de-

vices and designs of men, even theirs that know him not, Isa. x. 6, 7. In this campaign, *First*, They resolve to be very expeditious. They have no sooner resolved upon it than they address themselves to it; it shall never be said that they left any thing to be done towards it to-morrow which they could do to-day: *Arise, let us go up at noon*, though it be in the heat of the day; nay (v. 5), *Arise, let us go up by night*, though it be in the dark. Nothing shall hinder them; they are resolved to *lose no time*. They are described as men in care to make despatch (v. 4): *"Woe unto us, for the day goes away, and we are not going on with our work; the shadows of the evening are stretched out, and we sit still, and let slip the opportunity."* O that we were thus eager in our spiritual work and warfare, thus afraid of losing time, or any opportunity, in taking the kingdom of heaven by violence! It is folly to trifle when we have an eternal salvation to work out, and the enemies of that salvation to fight against. *Secondly*, They confidently expect to be very successful: *"Let us go up, and let us destroy her palaces and make ourselves masters of the wealth that is in them."* It was not that they might fulfil God's counsels, but that they might fill their own treasures, that they were thus eager; yet God thereby served his own purposes.

II. The cause of this judgment assigned. It is all for their wickedness; they have brought it upon themselves; they must bear it, for they must bear the blame of it. They are thus oppressed because they have been oppressors; they have dealt hardly with one another, each in his turn, as they have had power and advantage, and now the enemy shall come and deal hardly with them all. This sin of oppression, and violence, and wrong-doing, is here charged upon them, 1. As a national sin (v. 6): *Therefore this city is to be visited*, it is time to make inquisition, for *she is wholly oppression in the midst of her*. All orders and degrees of men, from the prince on the throne to the meanest master of a shop, were oppressive to those that were under them. Look which way you might, there were causes for complaints of this kind. 2. As a sin that had become in a manner natural to them (v. 7): *She casts out wickedness*, in all the instances of malice and mischievousness, *as a fountain casts out her waters*, so plentifully and constantly, the streams bitter and poisonous, like the fountain. The waters out of the fountain will not be restrained, but will find or force their way, nor will they be checked by laws or conscience in their violent proceedings. This is fitly applied to the corrupt heart of man in his natural state; it casts out wickedness, one evil imagination or other, as a fountain casts out her waters, naturally and easily; it is always flowing, and yet always full. 3. As that which had become a constant practice with them: *Vio-*



lence and spoil are heard in her. The cry of it had come up before God as that of Sodom: *Before me continually are grief and wounds*—the complaint of those that find themselves aggrieved, being unjustly wounded in their bodies or spirits, in their estates or reputation. Note, He that is the common Parent of mankind regards and resents, and sooner or later will revenge, the mischiefs and wrongs that men do to one another.

III. The counsel given them how to prevent this judgment. Fair warning is given now upon the whole matter: "*Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem!*" v. 8. Receive the instruction given thee both by the law of God and by his prophets; be wise at length for thyself." They knew very well what they had been instructed to do; nothing remained but to do it, for till then they could not be said to be instructed. The reason for this counsel is taken from the inevitable ruin they ran upon if they refused to comply with the instructions given them: *Lest my soul depart, or be disjoined, from thee.* This intimates what a tender affection and concern God had had for them; his very soul had been joined to them, and nothing but sin could disjoin it. Note, 1. The God of mercy is loth to depart even from a provoking people, and is earnest with them by true repentance and reformation to prevent things coming to that extremity. 2. Their case is very miserable from whom God's soul is disjoined; it intimates the loss not only of their outward blessings, but of those comforts and favours which are the more immediate and peculiar tokens of his love and presence. Compare this with that dreadful word (Heb. x. 38), *If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.* 3. Those whom God forsakes are certainly undone; when God's soul departs from Jerusalem she soon becomes desolate and uninhabited, Matt. xxiii. 38.

9 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, They shall thoroughly glean the remnant of Israel as a vine: turn back thine hand as a grape-gatherer into the baskets. 10 To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? Behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the LORD is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it. 11 Therefore I am full of the fury of the LORD; I am weary with holding in: I will pour it out upon the children abroad, and upon the assembly of young men together: for even the husband with the wife shall be taken, the aged with him that is full of days. 12 And their houses shall be turned unto others, *with their*

fields and wives together: for I will stretch out my hand upon the inhabitants of the land, saith the LORD. 13 For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest, every one dealeth falsely. 14 They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace. 15 Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? Nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time that I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the LORD. 16 Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein. 17 Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Harken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken.

The heads of this paragraph are the very same with those of the last; for precept must be upon precept and line upon line.

I. The ruin of Judah and Jerusalem is here threatened. We had before the haste which the Chaldean army made to the war (v. 4, 5); now here we have the havoc made by the war. How lamentable are the desolations here described! The enemy shall so long quarter among them, and be so insatiable in their thirst after blood and treasure, that they shall seize all they can meet with, and what escapes them at one time shall fall into their hands another (v. 9): *They shall thoroughly glean the remnant of Israel as a vine; as the grape-gatherer, who is resolved to leave none behind, still turns back his hand into the baskets,* to put more in, till he has gathered all, so shall they be picked up by the enemy, though dispersed, though hid, and none of them shall escape their eye and hand. Perhaps the people, being given to covetousness (v. 13), had not observed that law of God which forbade them to glean all their grapes (Lev. xix. 10), and now they themselves shall be in like manner thoroughly gleaned and shall either fall by the sword or go into captivity. This is explained v. 11, 12, where God's fury and his hand are said to be poured out and stretched out, in the fury and by the hand of the Chaldeans; for even wicked men are often made use of as God's hand (Ps. xvii. 14), and in their anger we may see God angry. Now

see on whom the fury is poured out in full vials—upon the children abroad, or in the streets, where they are playing (Zech. viii. 5) or whither they run out innocently to look about them: the sword of the merciless Chaldeans shall not spare them, *ch. ix. 21*. The children perish in the calamity which the fathers' sins have procured. The execution shall likewise reach the assembly of young men, their merry meetings, their clubs which they keep up to strengthen one another's hands in wickedness; they shall be cut off together. Nor shall those only fall into the enemies' hands who meet for lewdness (*ch. v. 7*), but even the husband with the wife shall be taken, these two in bed together, and neither left, but both taken prisoners. And, as they have no compassion for the weak but fair sex, so they have none for the decrepit but venerable age: *The old with the full of days*, whose deaths can contribute no more to their safety than their lives to their service, who are not in a capacity to do them either good or harm, shall be either cut off or carried off. *Their houses shall then be turned to others* (*v. 12*); the conquerors shall dwell in their habitations, use their goods, and live upon their stores; their fields and wives shall fall together into their hands, as was threatened, *Deut. xxviii. 30, &c.* For God stretches out his hand upon the inhabitants of the land, and none can go out of the reach of it. Now as to this denunciation of God's wrath, 1. The prophet justifies himself in preaching thus terribly, for herein he dealt faithfully (*v. 11*): "*I am full of the fury of the Lord*, full of the thoughts and apprehensions of it, and am carried out with a powerful impulse, by the spirit of prophecy, to speak of it thus vehemently." He took no delight in threatening, nor was it any pleasure to him with such sermons as these to make those about him uneasy; but he could not contain himself; he was weary with holding in; he suppressed it as long as he could, as long as he durst, but he was so full of power by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts that he must speak, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear. Note, When ministers preach the terrors of the Lord according to the scripture we have no reason to be displeased at them; for they are but messengers, and must deliver their message, pleasing or unpleasing. 2. He condemns the false prophets who preached plausibly, for therein they flattered people and dealt unfaithfully (*v. 13, 14*): *The priest and the prophet*, who should be their watchmen and monitors, have dealt falsely, have not been true to their trust nor told the people their faults and the danger they were in; they should have been their physicians, but they murdered their patients by letting them have their will, by giving them every thing they had a mind to, and flattering them into an opinion that they were in no danger (*v. 14*): They have healed

the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, or according to the cure of some slight hurt, skinning over the wound and never searching it to the bottom, applying lenitives only, when there was need of corrosives, soothing people in their sins, and giving them opiates to make them easy for the present, while the disease was preying upon the vitals. They said, "*Peace, peace—all shall be well*" (if there were some thinking people among them, who were awake, and apprehensive of danger, they soon stopped their mouths with their priestly and prophetic authority, boldly averring that neither church nor state was in any danger), when there is no peace, because they went on in their idolatries and daring impieties. Note, Those are to be reckoned our false friends (that is, our worst and most dangerous enemies) who flatter us in a sinful way.

II. The sin of Judah and Jerusalem, which provoked God to bring this ruin upon them and justified him in it, is here declared. 1. They would by no means bear to be told of their faults, nor of the danger they were in. God bids the prophet give them warning of the judgment coming (*v. 9*); "*but,*" says he, "*to whom shall I speak and give warning?*" I cannot find out any that will so much as give me a patient hearing. I may give warning long enough, but there is nobody that will take warning. I cannot speak that they may hear, cannot speak to any purpose, or with any hope of success; for their ear is uncircumcised, it is carnal and fleshly, indisposed to receive the voice of God, so that they cannot hearken. They have, as it were, a thick skin grown over the organs of hearing, so that divine things might to as much purpose be spoken to a stone as to them. Nay, they are not only deaf to it, but prejudiced against it; therefore they cannot hear, because they are resolved that they will not: The word of the Lord is unto them a reproach; both the reproofs and the threatenings of the word are so; they reckoned themselves wronged and affronted by both, and resented the prophet's plain-dealing with them as they would the most causeless slander and calumny. This was kicking against the pricks (*Acts ix. 5*), as the lawyers against the word of Christ. *Luke xi. 45, Thus saying, thou reproachest us also.* Note, Those reproofs that are counted reproaches, and hated as such, will certainly be turned into the heaviest woes. When it is here said, *They have no delight in the word*, more is implied than is expressed; "they have an antipathy to it; their hearts rise at it; it exasperates them, and enrages their corruptions, and they are ready to fly in the face and pull out the eyes of their reprovers." And how can those expect that the word of the Lord should speak any comfort to them who have no delight in it, but would rather be any where than within hearing of it? 2. They were



inordinately set upon the world, and wholly carried away by the love of it (v. 13): "*From the least of them even to the greatest, old and young, rich and poor, high and low, those of all ranks, professions, and employments, every one is given to covetousness, greedy of filthy lucre, all for what they can get, per fas per nefas—right or wrong.*" and this made them oppressive and violent (v. 6, 7), for of those evils, as well as others, the love of money is the bitter root. Nay, and this hardened their hearts against the word of God and his prophets. It was the covetous Pharisees that derided Christ, Luke xvi. 14. 3. They had become impudent in sin and were past shame. After such a high charge of flagrant crimes proved upon them, it was very proper to ask (v. 15), *Were they ashamed when they had committed all these abominations*, which are such a reproach to their reason and religion? Did they blush at the conviction, and acknowledge that confusion of face belonged to them? If so, there is some hope of them yet. But, alas! there did not appear so much as this colour of virtue among them; their hearts were so hardened that *they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush*, they had so brazened their faces. They even gloried in their wickedness, and openly confronted the convictions which should have humbled them and brought them to repentance. They resolved to face it out against God himself and not to own their guilt. Some refer this to the priests and prophets, who had healed the people slightly and told them that they should have peace, and yet were not ashamed of their treachery and falsehood, no, not when the event disproved them and gave them the lie. Those that are shameless are graceless and their case is hopeless. But those that will not submit to a penitential shame, nor take that to themselves as their due, shall not escape an utter ruin; for so it follows: *Therefore they shall fall among those that fall*; they shall have their portion with those that are quite undone; and, when God visits the nation in wrath, they shall be sure to be cast down and be made to tremble, because they would not blush. Note, Those that sin and cannot blush for it are in an evil case now, and it will be worse with them shortly. At first they hardened themselves and would not blush, afterwards they were so hardened that they could not. *Quod unum habebant in malis bonum perdunt, peccandi verecundiam—They have lost the only good property which once blended itself with many bad ones, that is, shame for having done amiss.*—Senec. De Vit. Beat.

III. They are put in mind of the good counsel which had been often given them, but in vain. They had a great deal said to them to little purpose,

1. By way of advice concerning their duty, v. 16. God had been used to say to them,

*Stand in the ways and see.* That is, (1.) He would have them to consider, not to proceed rashly, but to do as travellers in the road, who are in care to find the right way which will bring them to their journey's end, and therefore pause and enquire for it. If they have any reason to think that they have missed their way, they are not easy till they have obtained satisfaction. O that men would be thus *wise for their souls*, and would ponder the path of their feet, as those that believe lawful and unlawful are of no less consequence to us than the right way and the wrong are to a traveller! (2.) He would have them to consult antiquity, the observations and experiences of those that went before them: "*Ask for the old paths, enquire of the former age* (Job viii. 8), *ask thy father, thy elders* (Deut. xxxii. 7), and thou wilt find that the way of godliness and righteousness has always been the way which God has owned and blessed and in which men have prospered. Ask for the *old paths*, the paths prescribed by the law of God, the written word, that true standard of antiquity. Ask for the paths that the patriarchs travelled in before you, Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob; and, as you hope to inherit the promises made to them, tread in their steps. *Ask for the old paths, Where is the good way?*" We must not be guided merely by antiquity, as if the plea of prescription and long usage were alone sufficient to justify our path. No; there is an *old way which wicked men have trodden*, Job xxii. 15. But, when we ask for the old paths, it is only in order to find out the *good way*, the highway of the upright. Note, The way of religion and godliness is a good old way, the way that all the saints in all ages have walked in. (3.) He would have them to resolve to act according to the result of these enquiries: "When you have found out which is the good way, *walk therein*, practise accordingly, keep closely to that way, proceed, and persevere in it." Some make this counsel to be given them with reference to the struggles that were between the true and false prophets, between those that said they should have peace and those that told them trouble was at the door; they pretended they knew not which to believe: "*Stand in the way,*" says God, "and see, and enquire, which of these two agrees with the written word and the usual methods of God's providence, which of these directs you to the good way, and do accordingly." (4.) He assures them that, if they do thus, it will secure the welfare and satisfaction of their own souls: "*Walk in the good old way* and you will find that your walking in that way will be easy and pleasant; you will enjoy both your God and yourselves, and the way will lead you to true rest. Though it cost you some pains to walk in that way, you will find an abundant recompence at your journey's end." (5.) He laments that this

good counsel, which was so rational in itself and so proper for them, could not find acceptance: "*But they said, We will not walk therein, not only we will not be at the pains to enquire which is the good way, the good old way; but when it is told us, and we have nothing to say to the contrary but that it is the right way, yet we will not deny ourselves and our humours so far as to walk in it.*" Thus multitudes are ruined for ever by downright wilfulness.

2. By way of admonition concerning their danger. Because they would not be ruled by fair reasoning, God takes another method with them; by less judgments he threatens greater, and sends his prophets to give them this explication of them, and to frighten them with an apprehension of the danger they were in (v. 17): *Also I set watchmen over you.* God's ministers are watchmen, and it is a great mercy to have them set over us in the Lord. Now observe here, (1.) The fair warning given by these watchmen. This was the burden of their song; they cried again and again, *Hearken to the sound of the trumpet.* God, in his providence, sounds the trumpet (Zech. ix. 14); the watchmen hear it themselves and are affected with it (Jer. iv. 19), and they are to call upon others to hearken to it too, to hear the Lord's controversy, to observe the voice of Providence, to improve it, and answer the intentions of it. (2.) This fair warning slighted: "*But they said, We will not hearken; we will not hear, we will not heed, we will not believe; the prophets may as well save themselves and us the trouble.*" The reason why sinners perish is because they do not hearken to the sound of the trumpet; and the reason why they do not is because they will not; and they have no reason to give why they will not but because they will not, that is, they are herein most unreasonable. One may more easily deal with ten men's reasons than one man's will.

18 Therefore hear, ye nations, and know, O congregation, what *is* among them. 19 Hear, O earth: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, *even* the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it. 20 To what purpose cometh there to me incense from Sheba, and the sweet cane from a far country? your burnt-offerings *are* not acceptable, nor your sacrifices sweet unto me. 21 Therefore thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will lay stumbling-blocks before this people, and the fathers and the sons together shall fall upon them; the neighbour and his friend shall perish. 22 Thus

saith the LORD, Behold, a people cometh from the north country, and a great nation shall be raised from the sides of the earth. 23 They shall lay hold on bow and spear; they *are* cruel, and have no mercy; their voice roareth like the sea; and they ride upon horses, set in array as men for war against thee, O daughter of Zion. 24 We have heard the fame thereof: our hands wax feeble: anguish hath taken hold of us, *and* pain, as of a woman in travail. 25 Go not forth into the field, nor walk by the way; for the sword of the enemy *and* fear *is* on every side. 26 O daughter of my people, gird *thee* with sackcloth, and wallow thyself in ashes: make thee mourning, *as for* an only son, most bitter lamentation: for the spoiler shall suddenly come upon us. 27 I have set thee *for* a tower *and* a fortress among my people, that thou mayest know and try their way. 28 They *are* all grievous revolvers, walking with slanders: *they are* brass and iron; they *are* all corrupters. 29 The bellows are burned, the lead is consumed of the fire; the founder melteth in vain: for the wicked are not plucked away. 30 Reprobate silver shall *men* call them, because the LORD hath rejected them.

Here, I. God appeals to all the neighbours, nay, to the whole world, concerning the equity of his proceedings against Judah and Jerusalem (v. 18, 19): "*Hear, you nations, and know* particularly, *O congregation* of the mighty, the great men of the nations, that take cognizance of the affairs of the states about you and make remarks upon them. Observe now what is doing among those of Judah and Jerusalem; you hear of the desolations brought upon them, the earth rings of it, trembles under it; you all wonder that I should *bring evil upon this people*, that are in covenant with me, that profess relation to me, that have worshipped me, and been highly favoured by me; you are ready to ask, *Wherefore has the Lord done thus to this land?*" Deut. xxix. 24. Know then," 1. "That it is the natural product of their devices. The evil brought upon them is *the fruit of their thought*. They thought to strengthen themselves by their alliance with foreigners, and by that very thing they weakened and diminished themselves, they betrayed and exposed themselves." 2. "That it is the just punishment



of their disobedience and rebellion. God does but execute upon them the curse of the law for their violation of its commands. It is because *they have not hearkened to my words nor to my law*, nor regarded a word I have said to them, but rejected it all. They would never have been ruined thus by the judgments of God's hand if they had not refused to be ruled by the judgments of his mouth: therefore you cannot say that they have any wrong done them."

II. God rejects their plea, by which they insisted upon their external services as sufficient to atone for all their sins. Alas! it is a frivolous plea (v. 20): "*To what purpose come there to me incense and sweet cane, to be burnt for a perfume on the golden altar, though it was the best of the kind, and far-fetched? What care I for your burnt-offerings and your sacrifices?*" They not only cannot profit God (no sacrifice does, Ps. 1. 9), but they do not please him, for none does this but the sacrifice of the upright; that of the wicked is an *abomination to him*. Sacrifice and incense were appointed to excite their repentance, and to direct them to a Mediator, and assist their faith in him. Where this good use was made of them they were acceptable, God had respect to them and to those that offered them. But when they were offered with an opinion that thereby they made God their debtor, and purchased a license to go on in sin, they were so far from being pleasing to God that they were a provocation to him.

III. He foretels the desolation that was now coming upon them. 1. God designs their ruin because they hate to be reformed (v. 21): *I will lay stumbling-blocks before this people*, occasions of falling not into sin, but into trouble. Those whom God has marked for destruction he perplexes and embarrasses in their counsels, and obstructs and retards all the methods they take for their own safety. The parties of the enemy, which they met with wherever they went, were stumbling-blocks to them; in every corner they stumbled upon them and were dashed to pieces by them: *The fathers and the sons together shall fall upon them*; neither the fathers with their wisdom, nor the sons with their strength and courage, shall escape them, or get over them. The sons that sinned with their fathers fall with them. Even the *neighbour and his friend shall perish* and not be able to help either themselves or one another. 2. He will make use of the Chaldeans as instruments of it; for whatever work God has to do he will find out proper instruments for the doing of it. This is a people fetched from the north, from the sides of the earth. Babylon itself lay a great way off northward; and some of the countries that were subject to the king of Babylon, out of which his army was levied, lay much further. These must be employed in this service, v. 22, 23.

For, (1.) It is a people very numerous, a *great nation*, which will make their invasion the more formidable. (2.) It is a warlike people. *They lay hold on bow and spear*, and at this time know how to use them, for they are used to them. *They ride upon horses*, and therefore they inarch the more swiftly, and in battle press the harder. No nation had yet brought into the field a better cavalry than the Chaldeans. (3.) It is a barbarous people. *They are cruel and have no mercy*, being greedy of prey and flushed with victory. They take a pride in frightening all about them; their voice *roars like the sea*. And, (4.) They have a particular design upon Judah and Jerusalem, in hopes greatly to enrich themselves with the spoil of that famous country. They are *set in array against thee, O daughter of Zion!* The sins of God's professing people make them an easy prey to those that are God's enemies as well as theirs.

IV. He describes the very great consternation which Judah and Jerusalem should be in upon the approach of this formidable enemy, v. 24—26. 1. They own themselves in a fright, upon the first intelligence brought them of the approach of the enemy: "*When we have but heard the fame thereof our hands wax feeble*, and we have no heart to make any resistance; *anguish has taken hold of us*, and we are immediately in an extremity or pain, like that of a woman in travail." Note, Sense of guilt quite dispirits men, upon the approach of any threatening trouble. What can those hope to do for themselves who have made God their enemy? 2. They confine themselves by consent to their houses, not daring to show their heads abroad; for, though they could not but expect that the sword of the enemy would at last find them out there, yet they would rather die tamely and meanly there than run any venture, either by fight or flight, to help themselves. Thus they say one to another, "*Go not forth into the field*, no, not to fetch in your provision thence, *nor walk by the way*; dare not to go to church or market, it is at your peril if you do, for the *sword of the enemy*, and the fear of it, are on every side; the *highways are unoccupied*, as in Jael's time," Judg. v. 6. Let this remind us, when we travel the roads in safety and there is none to make us afraid, to bless God for our share in the public tranquillity. 3. The prophet calls upon them sadly to lament the desolations that were coming upon them. He was himself the lamenting prophet, and called upon his people to join with him in his lamentations: "*O daughter of my people*, hear thy God calling thee to weeping and mourning, and answer his call: do not only put on sackcloth for a day, but gird it on for thy constant wear; do not only put ashes on thy head, but *wallow thyself in ashes*; put thyself into close mourning, and use all the tokens

of bitter lamentation, not forced and for show only, but with the greatest sincerity, as parents *mourn for an only son*, and think themselves comfortless because they are childless. Thus do thou lament for *the spoiler that suddenly comes upon us*. Though he has not come yet, he is *coming*, the decree has *gone forth*: let us therefore meet the execution of it with a suitable sadness. As saints may rejoice in hope of God's mercies, though they see them only in the promise, so sinners must mourn for fear of God's judgments, though they see them only in the threatenings.

V. He constitutes the prophet a judge over these people that now stand upon their trial: as *ch. i. 10, I have set thee over the nations*; so here, *I have set thee for a tower*, or as a sentinel, or a watchman, upon a tower, *among my people*, as an inspector of their actions, *that thou mayest know, and try their way, v. 27*. Not that God needed any to inform him concerning them; on the contrary, the prophet knew little of them in comparison but by the spirit of prophecy. But thus God appeals to the prophet himself, and his own observation concerning their character, that he might be fully satisfied in the equity of God's proceedings against them and with the more assurance give them warning of the judgments coming. God set him for a tower, conspicuous to all and attacked by many, but made him a *fortress*, a *strong tower*, gave him courage to stem the tide and bear the shock of their displeasure. Those that will be faithful reprovers have need to be firm as fortresses. Now in trying their way he will find two things:—1. That they are wretchedly debauched (*v. 23*): *They are all grievous revolters, revolters of revolters* (so the word is), the worst of revolters, as a *servant of servants* is the meanest servant. They have a revolting heart, have deeply revolted, and revolt more and more. They seemed to start fair, but they revolt and start back. *They walk with slanders*; they make nothing of belying and backbiting one another, nay, they make a perfect trade of it; it is their constant course, and they govern themselves by the slanders they hear, hating those that they hear ill-spoken of, though ever so unjustly. They are *brass and iron*, base metals, and there is nothing in them that is valuable. They were as silver and gold, but they have degenerated. Nay, as *they are all revolters*, so *they are all corrupters*, not only debauched themselves, but industrious to debauch others, to corrupt them as they themselves are corrupt; nay, to make them seven times more the children of hell than themselves. It is often so; sinners soon become tempters. 2. That they would never be reclaimed and reformed; it was in vain to think of reforming them, for various methods had been tried with them, and all to no purpose, *v. 29, 30*. He compares them to ore that was supposed to have some good

metal in it, and was therefore put into the furnace by the refiner, who used all his art, and took abundance of pains, about it, but it proved all dross, nothing of any value could be extracted out of it. God by his prophets and by his providences had used the most proper means to refine this people and to purify them from their wickedness; but it was all in vain. By the continual preaching of the word, and a series of afflictions, they had been kept in a constant fire, but all to no purpose. *The bellows* have been still kept so near the fire, to blow it, that they are *burnt* with the heat of it, or they are quite worn out with long use and thrown into the fire as good for nothing. The prophets have preached their throats sore with crying aloud against the sins of Israel, and yet they are not convinced and humbled. *The lead*, which was then used in refining silver, as quicksilver is now, *is consumed of the fire*, and has not done its work. *The founder melts in vain*; his labour is lost, *for the wicked are not plucked away*, no care is taken to separate between the precious and the vile, to purge out the old leaven, to cast out of communion those who, being corrupt themselves, are in danger of infecting others. Or, *Their wickednesses are not removed* (so some read it); they are still as bad as ever, and nothing will prevail to part between them and their sins. They will not be brought off from their idolatries and immoralities by all they have heard, and all they have felt, of the wrath of God against them; and therefore that doom is passed upon them (*v. 30*): *Reprobate silver shall they be called*, useless and worthless; they glitter as if they had some silver in them, but there is nothing of real virtue or goodness to be found among them; and for this reason *the Lord has rejected them*. He will no more own them as his people, nor look for any good from them; he will *take them away like dross* (*Ps. cxix. 119*), and prepare a consuming fire for those that would not be purified by a refining fire. By this it appears, (1.) That God has *no pleasure in the death* and ruin of sinners, for he tries all ways and methods with them to prevent their destruction and qualify them for salvation. Both his ordinances and his providences have a tendency this way, to part between them and their sins; and yet with many it is all lost labour. *We have piped unto you, and you have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and you have not wept*. Therefore, (2.) God will be justified in the death of sinners and all the blame will lie upon themselves. He did not reject them till he had used all proper means to reform them; did not cast them off so long as there was any hope of them, nor abandon them as dross till it appeared that they were *reprobate silver*.

## CHAP. VII.

The prophet having in God's name reproved the people for their sins, and given them warning of the judgments of God that were



coming upon them, in this chapter prosecutes the same intention for their humiliation and awakening. I. He shows them the invalidity of the plea they so much relied on, that they had the temple of God among them and constantly attended the service of it, and endeavours to take them off from their confidence in their external privileges and performances, ver. 1—11. II. He reminds them of the desolations of Shiloh, and foretels that such should be the desolations of Jerusalem, ver. 12—16. III. He represents to the prophet their abominable idolatries, for which he was thus incensed against them, ver. 17—20. IV. He sets before the people that fundamental maxim of religion that "to obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. xv. 22), and that God would not accept the sacrifices of those that obstinately persisted in disobedience, ver. 21—28. V. He threatens to lay the land utterly waste for their idolatry and impiety, and to multiply their slain as they had multiplied their sin, ver. 29—34.

**T**HE word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, 2 Stand in the gate of the LORD's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all *ye of* Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the LORD. 3 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. 4 Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, *are* these. 5 For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; 6 *If* ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: 7 Then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever. 8 Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. 9 Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods, whom ye know not; 10 And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations? 11 Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? behold, even I have seen *it*, saith the LORD. 12 But go ye now unto my place which *was* in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. 13 And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the LORD, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye

answered not; 14 Therefore will I do unto *this* house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. 15 And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, *even* the whole seed of Ephraim.

These verses begin another sermon, which is continued in this and the two following chapters, much to the same effect with those before, to reason them to repentance. Observe,

I. The orders given to the prophet to preach this sermon; for he had not only a general commission, but particular directions and instructions for every message he delivered. This was *a word that came to him from the Lord*, v. 1. We are not told when this sermon was to be preached; but are told, 1. Where it must be preached—in *the gate of the Lord's house*, through which they entered into the outer court, or *the court of the people*. It would affront the priests, and expose the prophet to their rage, to have such a message as this delivered within their precincts; but the prophet must not fear the face of man, he cannot be faithful to his God if he do. 2. To whom it must be preached—to the men of Judah, *that enter in at these gates to worship the Lord*; probably it was at one of the three feasts, when all the males from all parts of the country were to appear before the Lord in the courts of his house, and not to *appear empty*: then he had many together to preach to, and that was the most seasonable time to admonish them not to trust to their privileges. Note, (1.) Even those that profess religion have need to be preached to as well as those that are without. (2.) It is desirable to have opportunity of preaching to many together. Wisdom chooses to cry in *the chief place of concourse*, and, as Jeremiah here, *in the opening of the gates*, the temple-gates. (3.) When we are going to worship God we have need to be admonished to *worship him in the spirit*, and to *have no confidence in the flesh*, Phil. iii. 3.

II. The contents and scope of the sermon itself. It is delivered in the name of *the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel*, who commands the world, but covenants with his people. As creatures we are bound to regard the *Lord of hosts*, as Christians *the God of Israel*; what he said to them he says to us, and it is much the same with that which John Baptist said to those whom he baptized (Matt. iii. 8, 9), *Bring forth fruits meet for repentance; and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father.* The prophet here tells them,

1. What were the true words of God, which they might trust to. In short, they might depend upon it that if they would re-

pent and reform their lives, and return to God in a way of duty, he would restore and confirm their peace, would redress their grievances, and return to them in a way of mercy (v. 3): *Amend your ways and your doings*. This implies that there had been much amiss in their ways and doings, many faults and errors. But it is a great instance of the favour of God to them that he gives them liberty to amend, shows them where and how they must amend, and promises to accept them upon their amendment: "*I will cause you to dwell quietly and peaceably in this place*, and a stop shall be put to that which threatens your expulsion." Reformation is the only way, and a sure way, to prevent ruin. He explains himself (v. 5—7), and tells them particularly,

(1.) What the amendment was which he expected from them. They must *thoroughly amend*; in *making good*, they must *make good their ways and doings*; they must reform with resolution, and it must be a universal, constant, persevering reformation—not partial, but entire—not hypocritical, but sincere—not wavering, but constant. They must make the tree good, and so make the fruit good, must amend their hearts and thoughts, and so amend their ways and doings. In particular, [1.] They must be honest and just in all their dealings. Those that had power in their hands must *thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour*, without partiality, and according as the merits of the cause appeared. They must not either in judgment or in contract *oppress the stranger, the fatherless, or the widow*, nor countenance or protect those that did oppress, nor refuse to do them justice when they sought for it. They must *not shed innocent blood*, and with it defile *this place* and the land wherein they dwelt. [2.] They must keep closely to the worship of the true God only: "*Neither walk after other gods*; do not hanker after them, nor hearken to those that would draw you into communion with idolaters; for it is, and will be, *to your own hurt*. Be not only so just to your God, but so wise for yourselves, as not to throw away your adorations upon those who are not able to help you, and thereby provoke him who is able to destroy you." Well, this is all that God insists upon.

(2.) He tells them what the establishment is which, upon this amendment, they may expect from him (v. 7): "Set about such a work of reformation as this with all speed, go through with it, and abide by it; and *I will cause you to dwell in this place*, this temple; it shall continue your place of resort and refuge, the place of your comfortable meeting with God and one another; and you shall dwell *in the land that I gave to your fathers for ever and ever*, and shall never be turned out either from God's house or from your own." It is promised that they shall still enjoy their civil and sacred privileges, that they shall have a comfortable enjoyment

of them: *I will cause you to dwell here*; and those dwell at ease to whom God gives a settlement. They shall enjoy it by covenant, by virtue of the grant made of it to their fathers, not by providence, but by promise. They shall continue in the enjoyment of it without eviction or molestation; they shall not be disturbed, much less dispossessed, *for ever and ever*; nothing but sin could throw them out. An everlasting inheritance in the heavenly Canaan is hereby secured to all that live in godliness and honesty. And the vulgar Latin reads a further privilege here, v. 3, 7. *Habitabo vobiscum—I will dwell with you in this place*; and we should find Canaan itself but an uncomfortable place to dwell in if God did not dwell with us there.

2. What were the lying words of their own hearts, which they must not trust to. He cautions them against this self-deceit (v. 4): "*Trust not in lying words*. You are told in what way, and upon what terms, you may be easy, safe, and happy; now do not flatter yourselves with an opinion that you may be so on any other terms, or in any other way." Yet he charges them with this self-deceit arising from vanity (v. 8): "*Behold*, it is plain that *you do trust in lying words*, notwithstanding what is said to you; you trust in *words that cannot profit*; you rely upon a plea that will stand you in no stead." Those that slight the words of truth, which would profit them, take shelter in words of falsehood, which cannot profit them. Now these lying words were, "*The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these*. These buildings, the courts, the holy place, and the holy of holies, are the *temple of the Lord*, built by his appointment, to his glory; here he resides, here he is worshipped, here we meet three times a year to pay our homage to him as our King in his palace." This they thought was security enough to them to keep God and his favours from leaving them, God and his judgments from breaking in upon them. When the prophets told them how sinful they were, and how miserable they were likely to be, still they appealed to the temple: "How can we be either so or so, as long as we have that holy happy place among us?" The prophet repeats it because they repeated it upon all occasions. It was the cant of the times; it was in their mouths upon all occasions. If they heard an awakening sermon, if any startling piece of news was brought to them, they lulled themselves asleep again with this, "We cannot but do well, for we have *the temple of the Lord among us*." Note, The privileges of a *form of godliness* are often the pride and confidence of those that are strangers and enemies to the power of it. It is common for those that are furthest from God to boast themselves most of their being near to the church. They are *haughty because of the holy mountain* (Zeph.



iii. 11), as if God's mercy were so tied to them that they might defy his justice. Now to convince them what a frivolous plea this was, and what little stead it would stand them in,

(1.) He shows them the gross absurdity of it in itself. If they knew any thing either of the temple of the Lord or of the Lord of the temple, they must think that to plead that, either in excuse of their sin against God or in arrest of God's judgment against them, was the most ridiculous unreasonable thing that could be. [1.] God is a holy God; but this plea made him the patron of sin, of the worst of sins, which even the light of nature condemns, v. 9, 10. "What," says he, "*will you steal, murder, and commit adultery*, be guilty of the vilest immoralities, and which the common interest, as well as the common sense, of mankind witness against? *Will you swear falsely*, a crime which all nations (who with the belief of a God have had a veneration for an oath) have always had a horror of? *Will you burn incense to Baal*, a dunghill-deity, that sets up as a rival with the great Jehovah, and, not content with that, *will you walk after other gods too, whom you know not*, and by all these crimes put a daring affront upon God, both as the Lord of hosts and as the God of Israel? Will you exchange a God of whose power and goodness you have had such a long experience for gods of whose ability and willingness to help you you know nothing? And, when you have thus done the worst you can against God, will you brazen your faces so far as to come and stand before him in this house which is called by his name and in which his name is called upon—stand before him as servants waiting his commands, as suppliants expecting his favour? Will you act in open rebellion against him, and yet herd among his subjects, among the best of them? By this, it should seem, you think that either he does not discover or does not dislike your wicked practices, to imagine either of which is to put the highest indignity possible upon him. It is as if you should say, *We are delivered to do all these abominations.*" If they had not the front to say this, *totidem verbis*—in so many words, yet their actions spoke it aloud. They could not but own that God, even their own God, had many a time delivered them, and been a present help to them, when otherwise they must have perished. He, in delivering them, designed to reduce them to himself, and by his goodness to lead them to repentance; but they resolved to persist in their abominations notwithstanding. As soon as they were delivered (as of old in the days of the Judges) they did evil again in the sight of the Lord, which was in effect to say, in direct contradiction to the true intent and meaning of the providences which had affected them, that God had delivered them in order to put them again into a capacity of rebelling against him, by sacrificing the more profusely to

their idols. Note, Those who continue in sin because grace has abounded, or that grace may abound, do in effect make Christ the minister of sin. Some take it thus: "You present yourselves before God with your sacrifices and sin-offerings, and then say, *We are delivered*, we are discharged from our guilt, now it shall do us no hurt; when all this is but to blind the world, and stop the mouth of conscience, that you may, the more easily to yourselves and the more plausibly before others, *do all these abominations.*" [2.] His temple was a holy place; but this plea made it a protection to the most unholy persons: "*Has this house, which is called by my name and is a standing sign of God's kingdom, set up among men in opposition to the kingdom of sin and Satan—has this become a den of robbers in your eyes?* Do you think it was built to be not only a rendezvous of, but a refuge and shelter to, the vilest of malefactors?" No; though the horns of the altar were a sanctuary to him that slew a man unawares, yet they were not so to a wilful murderer, nor to one that did aught presumptuously, Exod. xxi. 14; 1 Kings ii. 29. Those that think to excuse themselves in unchristian practices with the Christian name, and sin the more boldly and securely because there is a sin-offering provided, do, in effect, make God's house of prayer a den of thieves, as the priests in Christ's time, Matt. xxi. 13. But could they thus impose upon God? No: *Behold, I have seen it, saith the Lord*, have seen the real iniquity through the counterfeit and dissembled piety. Note, Though men may deceive one another with the appearances of devotion, yet they cannot deceive God.

(2.) He shows them the insufficiency of this plea adjudged long since in the case of Shiloh. [1.] It is certain that Shiloh was ruined, though it had God's sanctuary in it, when by its wickedness it profaned that sanctuary (v. 12): *Go you now to my place which was in Shiloh*. It is probable that the ruins of that once flourishing city were yet remaining; they might, at least, read the history of it, which ought to affect them as if they saw the place. There God set his name at the first, there the tabernacle was set up when Israel first took possession of Canaan (Josh. xviii. 1), and thither the tribes went up; but those that attended the service of the tabernacle there corrupted both themselves and others, and from them arose the wickedness of his people Israel; that fountain was poisoned, and sent forth malignant streams; and what came of it? Go, see what God did to it! Was it protected by its having the tabernacle in it? No; God forsook it (Ps. lxxviii. 60), sent his ark into captivity, cut off the house of Eli that presided there; and it is very probable that the city was quite destroyed, for we never read any more of it but as a monument of divine vengeance upon holy places when they har-



bour wicked people. Note, God's judgments upon others, who have really revolted from God while they have kept up a profession of nearness to him, should be a warning to us not to *trust in lying words*. It is good to consult precedents, and make use of them. Remember *Lot's wife*; remember Shiloh and the seven churches of Asia; and know that the ark and candlestick are moveable things, Rev. ii. 5; Matt. xxi. 43. [2.] It is as certain that Shiloh's fate will be Jerusalem's doom if a speedy and sincere repentance prevent it not. *First*, Jerusalem was now as sinful as ever Shiloh was; that is proved by the unerring testimony of God himself against them (v. 13): "*You have done all these works, you cannot deny it:*" and they continued obstinate in their sin; that is proved by the testimony of God's messengers, by whom he *spoke to them* to return and repent, *rising up early and speaking*, as one in care, as one in earnest, as one who would lose no time in dealing with them, nay, who would take the fittest opportunity for speaking to them *early in the morning*, when, if ever, they were sober, and had their thoughts free and clear; but it was all in vain. God spoke, but they *heard not*, they heeded not, they never minded; he *called them*, but they *answered not*; they would not come at his call. Note, What God has spoken to us greatly aggravates what we have done against him. *Secondly*, Jerusalem shall shortly be as miserable as ever Shiloh was: *Therefore I will do unto this house as I did to Shiloh*, ruin it, and lay it waste, v. 14. Those that tread in the steps of the wickedness of those that went before them must expect to fall by the like judgments, for all these things *happened to them for ensamples*. The temple at Jerusalem, though ever so strongly built, if wickedness was found in it, would be as unable to keep its ground and as easily conquered as even the tabernacle in Shiloh was, when God's day of vengeance had come. "This house" (says God) "*is called by my name*, and therefore you may think that I should protect it; it is the house in which you trust, and you think that it will protect you; this land is the place, this city the place, which I gave to you and your fathers, and therefore you are secure of the continuance of it, and think that nothing can turn you out of it; but the men of Shiloh thus flattered themselves and did but deceive themselves." He quotes another precedent (v. 15), the ruin of the kingdom of the ten tribes, who were the seed of Abraham, and had the covenant of circumcision, and possessed the land which God gave to them and their fathers, and yet their idolatries threw them out and extirpated them: "And can you think but that the same evil courses will be as fatal to you?" Doubtless they will be so; for God is uniform and of a piece with himself in his judicial proceedings. It is a rule of justice, *ut parium par*

*sit ratio*—that in similar cases the same judgment should proceed. "You have corrupted yourselves as your brethren the seed of Ephraim did, and have become their brethren in iniquity, and therefore I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast them." The interpretation here given of the judgment makes it a terrible one indeed; the casting of them out of their land signified God's casting them out of his sight, as if he would never look upon them, never look after them, more. Wherever we are cast, it is well enough, if we be kept in the love of God; but, if we are thrown out of his favour, our case is miserable though we dwell in our own land. This threatening, that God would make this house like Shiloh, we shall meet with again, and find Jeremiah indicted for it, *ch. xxvi. 6*.

16 Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee. 17 Seest thou not what they do in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem? 18 The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings unto other gods, that they may provoke me to anger. 19 Do they provoke me to anger? saith the LORD: do they not provoke themselves to the confusion of their own faces? 20 Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, mine anger and my fury shall be poured out upon this place, upon man, and upon beast, and upon the trees of the field, and upon the fruit of the ground; and it shall burn, and shall not be quenched.

God had shown them, in the foregoing verses, that the temple and the service of it, of which they boasted and in which they trusted, should not avail to prevent the judgment threatened. But there was another thing which might stand them in some stead, and which yet they had no value for, and that was the prophet's intercession for them; his prayers would do them more good than their own pleas: now here that support is taken from them; and their case is sad indeed who have lost their interest in the prayers of God's ministers and people.

I. God here forbids the prophet to pray for them (v. 16): "The decree has gone forth, their ruin is resolved on, therefore pray not thou for this people, that is, pray not for the preventing of this judgment threatened; they have sinned unto death, and therefore pray not for their life, but for the life of their souls," 1 John v. 16. See here.



1. That God's prophets are praying men; Jeremiah foretold the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem, and yet prayed for their preservation, not knowing that the decree was absolute; and it is the will of God that we *pray for the peace of Jerusalem*. Even when we threaten sinners with damnation we must pray for their salvation, that they may *turn and live*. Jeremiah was hated, and persecuted, and reproached, by the children of his people, and yet he prayed for them; for it becomes us to render good for evil. 2. That God's praying prophets have a great interest in heaven, how little soever they have on earth. When God has determined to destroy this people, he bespeaks the prophet not to pray for them, because he would not have his prayers to lie (as prophets' prayers seldom did) unanswered. God said to Moses, *Let me alone*, Exod. xxii. 10. 3. It is an ill omen to a people when God restrains the spirits of his ministers and people from praying for them, and gives them to see their case so desperate that they have no heart to speak a good word for them. 4. Those that will not regard good ministers' preaching cannot expect any benefit by their praying. If you will not hear us when we speak from God to you, God will not hear us when we speak to him for you.

II. He gives him a reason for this prohibition. Praying breath is too precious a thing to be lost and thrown away upon a people hardened in sin and marked for ruin.

1. They are resolved to persist in their rebellion against God, and will not be turned back by the prophet's preaching. For this he appeals to the prophet himself, and his own inspection and observation (v. 17): *Seest thou not what they do* openly and publicly, without either shame or fear, *in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem?* This intimates both that the sin was evident and could not be denied and that the sinners were impudent and would not be reclaimed; they committed their wickedness even in the prophet's presence and under his eye; he saw what they did, and yet they did it, which was an affront to his office, and to him whose officer he was, and bade defiance to both. Now observe,

(1.) What the sin is with which they are here charged—it is idolatry, v. 18. Their idolatrous respects are paid to the *queen of heaven*, the moon, either in an image or in the original, or both. They worshipped it probably under the name of *Ashtaroth*, or some other of their goddesses, being in love with the brightness in which they saw the moon walk, and thinking themselves indebted to her for her benign influences or fearing her malignant ones, Job xxxi. 26. The worshipping of the moon was much in use among the heathen nations, ch. xlv. 17, 19. Some read it the *frame or workmanship of heaven*. The whole celestial globe with all its ornaments and powers was

the object of their adoration. They *worshipped the host of heaven*, Acts vii. 42. The homage they should have paid to their Prince they paid to the statues that beautified the frontispiece of his palace; they worshipped the creatures instead of him that made them, the servants instead of him that commands them, and the gifts instead of him that gave them. *With the queen of heaven* they worshipped *other gods*, images of things not only in *heaven above*, but in *earth beneath*, and in *the waters under the earth*; for those that forsake the true God wander endlessly after false ones. To these deities of their own making they offer *cakes* for meat-offerings, and *pour out drink-offerings*, as if they had their meat and drink from them and were obliged to make to them their acknowledgments: and see how busy they are, and how every hand is employed in the service of these idols, according as they used to be employed in their domestic services. *The children were sent to gather wood; the fathers kindled the fire* to heat the oven, being of the poorer sort that could not afford to keep servants to do it, yet they would rather do it themselves than it should be undone; *the women kneaded the dough* with their own hands, for perhaps, though they had servants to do it, they took a pride in showing their zeal for their idols by doing it themselves. Let us be instructed, even by this bad example, in the service of our God. [1.] Let us *honour him with our substance*, as those that have our subsistence from him, and eat and drink to the glory of him from whom we have our meat and drink. [2.] Let us not decline the hardest services, nor disdain to stoop to the meanest, by which God may be honoured; for none shall *kindle a fire on God's altar for nought*. Let us think it an honour to be employed in any work for God. [3.] Let us bring up our children in the acts of devotion; let them, as they are capable, be employed in doing something towards the keeping up of religious exercises.

(2.) What is the direct tendency of this sin: "It is that they may *provoke me to anger*; they cannot design any thing else in it. But (v. 19) *do they provoke me to anger?* Is it because I am hard to be pleased, or easily provoked? Or am I to bear the blame of the resentment? No; it is their own doing; they may thank themselves, and they alone shall bear it." *Is it against God that they provoke him to wrath?* Is he the worse for it? Does it do him any real damage? No; is it not *against themselves*, to the *confusion of their own faces*? It is malice against God, but it is impotent malice; it cannot hurt him: nay, it is foolish malice; it will hurt themselves. They show their spite against God, but they do the spite to themselves. Canst thou think any other than that a people, thus desperately set upon their own ruin, should be abandoned?

2. God is resolved to proceed in his judg-

ments against them, and will not be turned back by the prophet's prayers (v. 20): *Thus saith the Lord God, and what he saith he will not unsay, nor can all the world gainsay it; hear it therefore, and tremble. "Behold, my anger and my fury shall be poured out upon this place, as the flood of waters was upon the old world or the shower of fire and brimstone upon Sodom; since they will anger me, let them see what will come of it."* They shall soon find, (1.) That there is no escaping this deluge of fire, either by flying from it or fencing against it; it shall be poured out on *this place*, though it be a holy place, the Lord's house. It shall reach both *man and beast*, like the plagues of Egypt, and, like some of them, shall destroy the *trees of the field and the fruit of the ground*, which they had designed and prepared for Baal, and of which they had made cakes to the queen of heaven. (2.) There is no extinguishing it: *It shall burn and shall not be quenched*; prayers and tears shall then avail nothing. When *his wrath is kindled but a little*, much more when it is kindled to such a degree, there shall be no quenching it. God's wrath is that fire unquenchable which eternity itself will not see the period of. *Depart, you cursed, into everlasting fire.*

21 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Put your burnt-offerings unto your sacrifices, and eat flesh. 22 For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: 23 But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you. 24 But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward. 25 Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them. 26 Yet they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck: they did worse than their fathers. 27 Therefore thou shalt speak all these words unto them; but they will not hearken to thee: thou shalt also call unto them; but they will not answer thee. 28 But thou shalt say

unto them, This *is* a nation that obeyeth not the voice of the LORD their God, nor receiveth correction: truth is perished, and is cut off from their mouth.

God, having shown the people that the temple would not protect them while they polluted it with their wickedness, here shows them that their sacrifices would not atone for them, nor be accepted, while they went on in disobedience. See with what contempt he here speaks of their ceremonial service (v. 21). "*Put your burnt-offerings to your sacrifices; go on in them as long as you please; add one sort of sacrifice to another; turn your burnt-offerings (which were to be wholly burnt to the honour of God) into peace-offerings*" (which the offerer himself had a considerable share of), "*that you may eat flesh, for that is all the good you are likely to have from your sacrifices, a good meal's meat or two; but expect not any other benefit by them while you live at this loose rate. Keep your sacrifices to yourselves*" (so some understand it); "*let them be served up at your own table, for they are no way acceptable at God's altars.*" For the opening of this,

I. He shows them that obedience was the only thing he required of them, v. 22. 23. He appeals to the original contract, by which they were first formed into a people, when they were brought out of Egypt. God made them a *kingdom of priests* to himself, not that he might be regaled with their sacrifices, as the devils, whom the heathen worshipped, which are represented as eating with pleasure the fat of their sacrifices and drinking the wine of their drink-offerings, Deut. xxxii. 38. No: *Will God eat the flesh of bulls?* Ps. l. 13. *I spake not to your fathers concerning burnt-offerings or sacrifices, not of them at first.* The precepts of the moral law were given before the ceremonial institutions; and those came afterwards, as trials of their obedience and assistances to their repentance and faith. The Levitical law begins thus: *If any man of you will bring an offering, he must do so and so* (Lev. i. 2, ii. 1), as if it were intended rather to regulate sacrifice than to require it. But that which God commanded, which he bound them to by his supreme authority and which he insisted upon as the condition of the covenant, was, *Obey my voice*; see Exod. xv. 26, where this was the statute and the ordinance by which God proved them: *Hearken diligently to the voice of the Lord thy God.* The condition of their being God's peculiar people was this (Exod. xix. 5), *If you will obey my voice indeed. "Make conscience of the duties of natural religion, observe positive institutions from a principle of obedience, and then I will be your God and you shall be my people,"* which is the greatest honour, happiness, and satisfaction, that any



of the children of men are capable of. "Let your conversation be regular, and in every thing study to comply with the will and word of God; *walk within the bounds that I have set you, and in all the ways that I have commanded you,* and then you may assure yourselves that *it shall be well with you.*" The demand here is very reasonable, that we should be directed by Infinite Wisdom to that which is fit, that he that made us should command us, and that he should give us law who gives us our being and all the supports of it; and the promise is very encouraging: Let God's will be your rule and his favour shall be your felicity.

II. He shows them that disobedience was the only thing for which he had a quarrel with them. *He would not reprove them for their sacrifices,* for the omission of them; they had been *continually before him* (Ps. l. 8); with them they hoped to bribe God, and purchase a license to go on in sin. That therefore which God had all along laid to their charge was breaking his commandments in the course of their conversation, while they observed them, in some instances, in the course of their devotion, v. 24, 25, &c.

1. They set up their own will in competition with the will of God: *They hearkened not to God and to his law; they never heeded that; it was to them as if it had never been given or were of no force; they inclined not their ear to attend to it,* much less their hearts to comply with it. But they would have their own way, would do as they chose, and not as they were bidden. *Their own counsels* were their guide, and not the dictates of divine wisdom; that shall be lawful and good with them which they think so, though the word of God says quite contrary. *The imagination of their evil heart,* the appetites and passions of it, shall be a law to them, and they will walk in the way of it, and in the sight of their eyes. 2. If they began well, yet they did not proceed, but soon flew off. *They went backward,* when they talked of making a captain, and returning to Egypt again, and would not go forward under God's conduct. They promised fair: *All that the Lord shall say unto us we will do;* and, if they would but have kept in that good mind, all would have been well; but, instead of going on in the way of duty, they drew back into the way of sin, and were worse than ever. 3. When God sent to them by word of mouth to put them in mind of the written word, which was the business of the prophets, it was all one; still they were disobedient. God had servants of his among them in every age, *since they came out of Egypt unto this day,* some or other to tell them of their faults and put them in mind of their duty, whom he *rose up early to send* (as before, v. 13), as men rise up early to call servants to their work; but they were as deaf to the prophets as they were to the law (v. 26): *Yet they hearkened not, nor in-*

*clined their ear.* This had been their way and manner all along; they were of the same stubborn refractory disposition with those that went before them; it had all along been the genius of the nation, and an evil genius it was, that continually haunted them till it ruined them at last. 4. Their practice and character were still the same. They are worse, and not better, *than their fathers.* (1.) Jeremiah can himself witness against them that they were disobedient, or he shall soon find it so (v. 27): *"Thou shalt speak all these words to them, shalt particularly charge them with disobedience and obstinacy. But even that will not work upon them: They will not hearken to thee, nor heed thee. Thou shalt go, and call to them with all the plainness and earnestness imaginable, but they will not answer thee; they will either give thee no answer at all or not an obedient answer; they will not come at thy call."* (2.) He must therefore own that they deserved the character of a disobedient people, that were ripe for destruction, and must go to them and tell them so to their faces (v. 28): *"Say unto them, This is a nation that obeys not the voice of the Lord their God. They are notorious for their obstinacy; they sacrifice to the Lord as their God, but they will not be ruled by him as their God; they will not receive either the instruction of his word or the correction of his rod; they will not be reclaimed or reformed by either. Truth has perished among them; they cannot receive it; they will not submit to it nor be governed by it. They will not speak truth; there is no believing a word they say, for it is cut off from their mouth, and lying comes in the room of it. They are false both to God and man."*

29 Cut off thine hair, O Jerusalem, and cast it away, and take up a lamentation on high places; for the Lord hath rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath. 30 For the children of Judah have done evil in my sight, saith the Lord: they have set their abominations in the house which is called by my name, to pollute it. 31 And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart. 32 Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that it shall no more be called Tophet, nor the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of slaughter; for they shall bury in Tophet, till there be no place. 33 And the carcases of this people shall be meat for the fowls of the heaven,

and for the beasts of the earth; and none shall fray *them* away. 34 Then will I cause to cease from the cities of Judah, and from the streets of Jerusalem, the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride: for the land shall be desolate.

Here is, I. A loud call to weeping and mourning. Jerusalem, that had been a joyous city, the joy of the whole earth, must now *take up a lamentation on high places* (v. 29), the high places where they had served their idols; there must they now bemoan their misery. In token both of sorrow and slavery, Jerusalem must now *cut off her hair and cast it away*; the word is peculiar to the hair of the Nazarites, which was the badge and token of their dedication to God, and it is called *their crown*. Jerusalem had been a city which was a Nazarite to God, but now must *cut off her hair*, must be profaned, degraded, and separated from God, as she had been separated to him. It is time for those that have lost their holiness to lay aside their joy.

II. Just cause given for this great lamentation.

1. The sin of Jerusalem appears here very heinous, nowhere worse, or more exceedingly sinful (v. 30): "*The children of Judah*" (God's professing people, that *came forth out of the waters of Judah*, Isa. xlviii. 1) "*have done evil in my sight, under my eye, in my presence; they have affronted me to my face, which very much aggravates the affront*;" or, "They have done that which they know to be *evil in my sight*, and in the highest degree offensive to me." Idolatry was the sin which was above all other sins evil in God's sight. Now here are two things charged upon them in their idolatry, which were very provoking:—(1.) That they were very impudent in it towards God and set him at defiance: *They have set their abominations* (their abominable idols and the altars erected to them) *in the house that is called by my name*, in the very courts of the temple, *to pollute it* (Manasseh did so, 2 Kings xxi. 7, xxiii. 12), as if they thought God would connive at it, or cared not though he was ever so much displeased with it, or as if they would reconcile heaven and hell, God and Baal. The heart is the place which God has chosen to *put his name there*; if sin have the innermost and uppermost place there, we pollute the temple of the Lord, and therefore he resents nothing more than *setting up idols in the heart*, Ezek. xiv. 4. (2.) That they were very barbarous in it towards their own children, v. 31. They have particularly *built the high places of Tophet*, where the image of Moloch was set up, *in the valley of the son of Hinnom*, adjoining to Jerusalem; and there *they burnt their sons and their daughters*

*in the fire*, burnt them alive, killed them, and killed them in the most cruel manner imaginable, to honour or appease those idols that were devils and not gods. This was surely the greatest instance that ever was of the power of Satan in the children of disobedience, and of the degeneracy and corruption of the human nature. One would willingly hope that there were not many instances of such a barbarous idolatry; but it is amazing that there should be any, that men could be so perfectly void of natural affection as to do a thing so inhuman as to burn little innocent children, and their own too, that they should be so perfectly void of natural religion as to think it lawful to do this, nay, to think it acceptable. Surely it was in a way of righteous judgment, because they had changed the glory of God into the similitude of a beast, that God gave them up to such vile affections that changed them into worse than beasts. God says of this that it was *what he commanded them not, neither came it into his heart*, which is not meant of his not commanding them thus to worship Moloch (this he had expressly *forbidden* them), but he had never commanded that his worshippers should be at such an expense, nor put such a force upon their natural affection, in honouring him; it never came into his heart to have children offered to him, yet they had forsaken his service for the service of such gods as, by commanding this, showed themselves to be indeed enemies to mankind.

2. The destruction of Jerusalem appears here very terrible. That speaks misery enough in general (v. 29), *The Lord hath rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath*. Sin makes those the generation of God's wrath that had been the generation of his love. And God will reject and quite forsake those who have thus by their impenitence made themselves *vessels of wrath fitted to destruction*. He will disown them for his. "Verily, I say unto you, I know you not." And he will give them up to the terrors of their own guilt, and leave them in those hands. (1.) Death shall triumph over them, v. 32, 33. Sin reigns unto death; for that is the wages of it, the end of those things. *Tophet*, the valley adjoining to Jerusalem, *shall be called the valley of slaughter*, for there multitudes shall be slain, when, in their sallies out of the city and their attempts to escape, they fall into the hands of the besiegers. Or it shall be called *the valley of slaughtered ones*, because thither the corpses of those that are slain shall be brought to be buried, all other burying places being full; and there they shall bury *until there be no more place* to make a grave. This intimates the multitude of those that shall die by the sword, pestilence, and famine. Death shall ride on prosperously, with dreadful pomp and power, *conquering and to conquer*. *The slain of the Lord shall be many*. This valley of Tophet was a place where the citizens of



Jerusalem walked to take the air; but it shall now be spoiled for that use, for it shall be so full of graves that there shall be no walking there, because of the danger of contracting a ceremonial pollution by the touch of a grave. There it was that they sacrificed some of their children, and dedicated others to Moloch, and there they should fall as victims to divine justice. Tophet had formerly been the burying place, or burning place, of the dead bodies of the besiegers, when the Assyrian army was routed by an angel; and for this it was *ordained of old*, Isa. xxx. 33. But they having forgotten this mercy, and made it the place of their sin, God will now turn it into a burying place for the besieged. In allusion to this valley, hell is in the New Testament called *Gehenna—the valley of Hinnom*, for there were buried both the invading Assyrians and the revolting Jews; so hell is a receptacle after death both for infidels and hypocrites, the open enemies of God's church and its treacherous friends; it is *the congregation of the dead*; it is prepared for the *generation of God's wrath*. But so great shall that slaughter be that even the spacious valley of Tophet shall not be able to contain the slain; and at length there shall not be enough left alive to bury the dead, so that *the carcases of the people shall be meat* for the birds and beasts of prey, that shall feed upon them like carrion, and none shall have the concern or courage to frighten them away, as Rizpah did from the dead bodies of Saul's sons, 2 Sam. xxi. 10. This was according to the threatening in the law, and a branch of the curse, Deut. xxviii. 26, *Thy carcase shall be meat to the fowls and beasts, and no man shall drive them away*. Thus do the law and the prophets agree, and the execution with both. The decent burying of the dead is a piece of humanity, in remembrance of what the dead body has been—the tabernacle of a reasonable soul. Nay, it is a piece of divinity, in expectation of what the dead body shall be at the resurrection. The want of it has sometimes been an instance of the rage of men against God's witnesses, Rev. xi. 9. Here it is threatened as an instance of the wrath of God against his enemies, and is an intimation that *evil pursues sinners* even after death. (2.) Joy shall depart from them (v. 34): *Then will I cause to cease the voice of mirth*. God had called by his prophets, and by less judgments, *to weeping and mourning*; but they walked contrary to him, and would hear of nothing but joy and gladness, Isa. xxii. 12, 13. And what came of it? Now God *called to lamentation* (v. 29), and he made his call effectual, leaving them neither cause nor heart for joy and gladness. Those that will not weep shall weep; those that will not by the grace of God be cured of their vain mirth shall by the justice of God be deprived of all mirth; for *when God judges he*

*will overcome*. It is threatened here that there shall be nothing to rejoice in. There shall be none of the joy of weddings; no mirth, for there shall be no marriages. The comforts of life shall be abandoned, and all care to keep up mankind upon earth cast off; there shall be none of *the voice of the bridegroom and the bride*, no music, no nuptial songs. Nor shall there be any more of the joy of harvest, *for the land shall be desolate, uncultivated and unimproved*. Both *the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem* shall look thus melancholy; and when they thus look about them, and see no cause to rejoice, no marvel if they retire into themselves and find no heart to rejoice. Note, God can soon mar the mirth of the most jovial, and make it to cease, which is a reason why we should always rejoice with trembling, be merry and wise.

## CHAP. VIII.

The prophet proceeds, in this chapter, both to magnify and to justify the destruction that God was bringing upon this people, to show how grievous it would be and yet how righteous. I. He represents the judgments coming as so very terrible that death should appear so as most to be dreaded and yet should be desired, ver. 1–5. II. He aggravates the wretched stupidity and wilfulness of this people as that which brought this ruin upon them, ver. 4–12. III. He describes the great confusion and consternation that the whole land should be in upon the alarm of it, ver. 13–17. IV. The prophet is himself deeply afflicted with it and lays it very much to heart, ver. 18–22.

AT that time, saith the LORD, they shall bring out the bones of the kings of Judah, and the bones of his princes, and the bones of the priests, and the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, out of their graves: 2 And they shall spread them before the sun, and the moon, and all the host of heaven, whom they have loved, and whom they have served, and after whom they have walked, and whom they have sought, and whom they have worshipped: they shall not be gathered, nor be buried; they shall be for dung upon the face of the earth. 3 And death shall be chosen rather than life by all the residue of them that remain of this evil family, which remain in all the places whither I have driven them, saith the LORD of hosts.

These verses might fitly have been joined to the close of the foregoing chapter, as giving a further description of the dreadful desolation which the army of the Chaldeans should make in the land. It shall strangely alter the property of death itself, and for the worse too.

I. Death shall not now be, as it always used to be—the repose of the dead. When Job makes his court to the grave it is in hope of this, that *there he shall rest with*

*kings and counsellors of the earth*; but now the ashes of the dead, even of *kings and princes*, shall be disturbed, and their *bones scattered at the grave's mouth*, Ps. cxli. 7. It was threatened in the close of the former chapter that the slain should be unburied; that might be through neglect, and was not so strange; but here we find the graves of those that were buried industriously and maliciously opened by the victorious enemy, who either for covetousness, hoping to find treasure in the graves, or for spite to the nation and in a rage against it, *brought out the bones of the kings of Judah and the princes*. The dignity of their sepulchres could not secure them, nay, did the more expose them to be rifled; but it was base and barbarous thus to trample upon royal dust. We will hope that the bones of good Josiah were not disturbed, because he piously protected the bones of the man of God when he burnt the bones of the idolatrous priests, 2 Kings xxiii. 18. The bones of the priests and prophets too were digged up and thrown about. Some think the false prophets and the idol-priests, God putting this mark of ignominy upon them: but, if they were God's prophets and his priests, it is what the Psalmist complains of as the fruit of the outrage of the enemies, Ps. lxxix. 1, 2. Nay, those of the spiteful Chaldeans that could not reach to violate the sepulchres of princes and priests would rather play at small game than sit out, and therefore pulled the bones of the ordinary *inhabitants of Jerusalem out of their graves*. The barbarous nations were sometimes guilty of these absurd and inhuman triumphs over those they had conquered, and God permitted it here, for a mark of his displeasure against the generation of his wrath, and for terror to those that survived. The bones, being dug out of the graves, were spread abroad upon the face of the earth in contempt, and to make the reproach the more spreading and lasting. They spread them to be dried that they might carry them about in triumph, or might make fuel of them, or make some superstitious use of them. *They shall be spread before the sun* (for they shall not be ashamed openly to avow the fact at noon day) and before *the moon and stars, even all the host of heaven*, whom they have made idols of, v. 2. From the mention of the *sun, moon, and stars*, which should be the unconcerned spectators of this tragedy, the prophet takes occasion to show how they had idolized them, and paid those respects to them which they should have paid to God only, that it might be observed how little they got by worshipping the creature, for the creatures they worshipped when they were in distress saw it, but regarded it not, nor gave them any relief, but were rather pleased to see those abused in being vilified by whom they had been abused in being deified. See how their

respects to their idols are enumerated, to show how we ought to behave towards our God. 1. They *loved* them. As amiable beings and bountiful benefactors they esteemed them and delighted in them, and therefore did all that follows. 2. They *served* them, did all they could in honour of them, and thought nothing too much; they conformed to all the laws of their superstition, without disputing. 3. They *walked after* them, strove to imitate and resemble them, according to the characters and accounts of them they had received, which gave rise and countenance to much of the abominable wickedness of the heathen. 4. They *sought* them, consulted them as oracles, appealed to them as judges, implored their favour, and prayed to them as their benefactors. 5. They *worshipped* them, gave them divine honour, as having a sovereign dominion over them. Before these lights of heaven, which they had courted, shall their dead bodies be cast, and left to putrefy, and to be *as dung upon the face of the earth*; and the sun's shining upon them will but make them the more noisome and offensive. Whatever we make a god of but the true God only, it will stand us in no stead on the other side death and the grave, not for the body, much less for the soul.

II. Death shall now be what it never used to be—the choice of the living, not because there appears in it any thing delightful; on the contrary, death never appeared in more horrid frightful shapes than now, when they cannot promise themselves either a comfortable death or a human burial; and yet every thing in this world shall become so irksome, and all the prospects so black and dismal, that *death shall be chosen rather than life* (v. 3), not in a believing hope of happiness in the other life, but in an utter despair of any ease in this life. The nation is now reduced to a *family*, so small is the *residue of those that remain* in it; and it is an *evil family*, still as bad as ever, their hearts unhumbled and their lusts unmortified. These *remain* alive (and that is all) in the many *places whither they were driven* by the judgments of God, some prisoners in the country of their enemies, others beggars in their neighbour's country, and others fugitives and vagabonds there and in their own country. And, though those that died died very miserably, yet those that survived and were thus driven out should live yet more miserably, so that they should *choose death rather than life*, and wish a thousand times that they had fallen with those that fell by the sword. Let this cure us of the inordinate love of life, that the case may be such that it may become a burden and terror, and we may be strongly tempted to *choose strangling* and death rather.

4 Moreover thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord; Shall



they fall, and not arise? shall he turn away, and not return? 5 Why then is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual backsliding? they hold fast deceit, they refuse to return. 6 I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle. 7 Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the LORD. 8 How do ye say, We are wise, and the law of the LORD is with us? Lo, certainly in vain made he it; the pen of the scribes is in vain. 9 The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken: lo, they have rejected the word of the LORD; and what wisdom is in them? 10 Therefore will I give their wives unto others, and their fields to them that shall inherit them: for every one from the least even unto the greatest is given to covetousness, from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely. 11 For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace. 12 Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore shall they fall among them that fall: in the time of their visitation they shall be cast down, saith the LORD.

The prophet here is instructed to set before this people the folly of their impenitence, which was it that brought this ruin upon them. They are here represented as the most stupid senseless people in the world, that would not be made wise by all the methods that Infinite Wisdom took to bring them to themselves and their right mind, and so to prevent the ruin that was coming upon them.

I. They would not attend to the dictates of reason. They would not act in the affairs of their souls with the same common prudence with which they acted in other things. Sinners would become saints if they would but show themselves men, and religion would soon rule them if right reason might. Ob-

serve it here. *Come, and let us reason together, saith the Lord (v. 4, 5): Shall men fall and not arise?* If men happen to fall to the ground, to fall into the dirt, will they not get up again as fast as they can? They are not such fools as to lie still when they are down. *Shall a man turn aside out of the right way?* Yes, the most careful traveller may miss his way; but then, as soon as he is aware of it, *will he not return?* Yes, certainly he will, with all speed, and will thank him that showed him his mistake. Thus men do in other things. *Why then has this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual backsliding?* Why do not they, when they have fallen into sin, hasten to get up again by repentance? Why do not they, when they see they have missed their way, correct their error and reform? No man in his wits will go on in a way that he knows will never bring him to his journey's end; *why then has this people slidden back by a perpetual backsliding?* See the nature of sin—it is a backsliding, it is going back from the right way, not only into a by-path, but into a contrary path, back from the way that leads to life to that which leads to utter destruction. And this backsliding, if almighty grace do not interpose to prevent it, will be a perpetual backsliding. The sinner not only wanders endlessly, but proceeds end-ways towards ruin. The same subtlety of the tempter that brings men to sin holds them fast in it, and they contribute to their own captivity: *They hold fast deceit.* Sin is a great cheat, and they hold it fast; they love it dearly, and resolve to stick to it, and baffle all the methods God takes to separate between them and their sins. The excuses they make for their sins are deceptions, and so are all their hopes of impunity; yet they hold fast these, and will not be undeceived, and therefore *they refuse to return.* Note, There is some deceit or other which those hold fast that go on wilfully in sinful ways, some lie in their right hand, by which they keep hold of their sins.

II. They would not attend to the dictates of conscience, which is our reason reflecting upon ourselves and our own actions, v. 6. Observe, 1. What expectations there were from them, that they would bethink themselves: *I hearkened and heard.* The prophet listened to see what effect his preaching had upon them; God himself listened, as one that desires not the death of sinners, that would have been glad to hear any thing that promised repentance, that would certainly have heard it if there had been any thing said of that tendency, and would soon have answered it with comfort, as he did David when he said, *I will confess, Ps. xxxii.* 5. God looks upon men when they have done amiss (Job xxxiii. 27), to see what they will do next; he hearkens and hears. 2. How these expectations were disappointed: *They spoke not aright*, as I thought they would

have done. They did not only not *do right*, but not so much as *speak right*; God could not get a good word from them, nothing on which to ground any favour to them or hopes concerning them. There was *none of them that spoke aright*, none that *repented him of his wickedness*. Those that have sinned, then, and then only, speak aright when they speak of repenting; and it is sad when those that have made so much work for repentance do not say a word of repenting. Not only did God not find any repenting of the national wickedness, which might have helped to empty the measure of public guilt, but none repented of that particular wickedness which he knew himself guilty of. (1.) They did not so much as take the first step towards repentance; they did not so much as say, *What have I done?* There was no motion towards it, not the least sign or token of it. Note, True repentance begins in a serious and impartial enquiry into ourselves, *what we have done*, arising from a conviction that we have done amiss. (2.) They were so far from repenting of their sins that they went on resolutely in their sins: *Every one turned to his course*, his wicked course, that course of sin which he had chosen and accustomed himself to, *as the horse rushes into the battle*, eager upon action, and scorning to be curbed. How the horse rushes into the battle is elegantly described, Job xxxix. 21, &c. *He mocks at fear and is not affrighted*. Thus the daring sinner laughs at the threatenings of the word as bugbears, and runs violently upon the instruments of death and slaughter, and nothing will be restrained from him.

III. They would not attend to the dictates of providence, nor understand the voice of God in them, v. 7. 1. It is an instance of their sottishness that, though they are God's people, and therefore should readily understand his mind upon every intimation of it, yet they *know not the judgment of the Lord*; they apprehend not the meaning either of a mercy or an affliction, not how to accommodate themselves to either, nor to answer God's intention in either. They know not how to improve the seasons of grace that God affords them when he sends them his prophets, nor how to make use of the rebukes they are under when *his voice cries in the city*. They *discern not the signs of the times* (Matt. xvi. 3), nor are aware how God is dealing with them. They know not that way of duty which God had prescribed them, though it be written both in their hearts and in their books. 2. It is an aggravation of their sottishness that there is so much sagacity in the inferior creatures. *The stork in the heaven knows her appointed times of coming and continuing*; so do other season-birds, *the turtle, the crane, and the swallow*. These by a natural instinct change their quarters, as the temper of the air alters; they come when the spring comes, and go, we know not whither, when

the winter approaches, probably into warmer climates, as some birds come with winter and go when that is over.

IV. They would not attend to the dictates of the written word. They say, *We are wise*; but *how* can they say so? v. 8. With what face can they pretend to any thing of wisdom, when they do not understand themselves so well as the brute-creatures? Why, truly, they think they are wise because *the law of the Lord is with them*, the book of the law and the interpreters of it; and their neighbours, for the same reason, conclude they are wise, Deut. iv. 6. But their pretensions are groundless for all this: *Lo, certainly in vain made he it*; surely never any people had Bibles to so little purpose as they have. They might as well have been without the law, unless they had made a better use of it. God has indeed made it able to make men wise to salvation, but as to them it is made so in vain, for they are never the wiser for it: *The pen of the scribes*, of those that first wrote the law and of those that now write expositions of it, *is in vain*. Both the favour of their God and the labour of their scribes are lost upon them; they receive the grace of God therein in vain. Note, There are many that enjoy abundance of the means of grace, that have great plenty of Bibles and ministers, but they have them in vain; they do not answer the end of their having them. But it might be said, They have some wise men among them, to whom the law and the pen of the scribes are not in vain. To this it is answered (v. 9): *The wise men are ashamed*, that is, they have reason to be so, that they have not made a better use of their wisdom, and lived more up to it. *They are confounded and taken*; all their wisdom has not served to keep them from those courses that tend to their ruin. They are taken in the same snares that others of their neighbours, who have not pretended to so much wisdom, are taken in, and filled with the same confusion. Those that have more knowledge than others, and yet do no better than others for their own souls, have reason to be ashamed. They talk of their wisdom, but, *Lo, they have rejected the word of the Lord*; they would not be governed by it, would not follow its direction, would not do what they knew; and then *what wisdom is in them?* None to any purpose; none that will be found to their praise at the great day, how much soever it is found to their pride now. The pretenders to wisdom, who said, "*We are wise and the law of the Lord is with us*," were the priests and the false prophets; with them the prophet here deals plainly. 1. He threatens the judgments of God against them. Their families and estates shall be ruined (v. 10): *Their wives shall be given to others*, when they are taken captives, *and their fields shall be taken from them by their victorious enemy and shall be*



given to those that shall inherit them, not only strip them for once, but take possession of them as their own and acquire a property in them, which they shall transmit to their posterity. And (v. 12), notwithstanding all their pretensions to wisdom and sanctity, *they shall fall among those that fall*; for, *if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall together into the ditch*. In the time of their visitation, when the wickedness of the land comes to be enquired into, it will be found that they have contributed to it more than any, and therefore *they shall be sure to be cast down and cast out*. 2. He gives a reason for these judgments (v. 10—12), even the same account of their badness which we meet with before (*ch. vi. 13—15*), where it was opened at large. (1.) They were greedy of the wealth of this world, which is bad enough in any, but worst in prophets and priests, who should be best acquainted with another world and therefore should be most dead to this. But these, *from the least to the greatest, were given to covetousness*. The priests teach for hire and the prophets divine for money, Mic. iii. 11. (2.) They made no conscience of speaking truth, no, not when they spoke as priests and prophets: *Every one deals falsely*, looks one way and rows another. There is no such thing as sincerity among them. (3.) They flattered people in their sins, and so flattered them into destruction. They pretended to be the physicians of the state, but knew not how to apply proper remedies to its growing maladies; they *healed them slightly*, killed the patient with palliative cures, silencing their fears and complaints with, “Peace, peace, all is well, and there is no danger,” when the God of heaven was proceeding in his controversy with them, so that there could be no peace to them. (4.) When it was made to appear how basely they prevaricated they were not at all ashamed of it, but rather gloried in it, (v. 12): *They could not blush*, so perfectly lost were they to all sense of virtue and honour. When they were convicted of the grossest forgeries they would justify what they had done, and laugh at those whom they had imposed upon. Such as these were ripe for ruin.

13 I will surely consume them, saith the LORD: *there shall be no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig-tree, and the leaf shall fade*; and *the things that I have given them shall pass away from them*. 14 Why do we sit still? Assemble yourselves, and let us enter into the defenced cities, and let us be silent there: for the LORD our God hath put us to silence, and given us water of gall to drink, because we have sinned against

the LORD. 15 We looked for peace, but no good *came*; and for a time of health, and behold trouble! 16 The snorting of his horses was heard from Dan: the whole land trembled at the sound of the neighing of his strong ones; for they are come, and have devoured the land, and all that is in it; the city, and those that dwell therein. 17 For, behold, I will send serpents, cockatrices, among you, which *will not be charmed*, and they shall bite you, saith the LORD. 18 *When I would comfort myself against sorrow, my heart is faint in me*. 19 Behold the voice of the cry of the daughter of my people because of them that dwell in a far country: *Is not the LORD in Zion? Is not her king in her? Why have they provoked me to anger with their graven images, and with strange vanities?* 20 The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved. 21 For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt; I am black; astonishment hath taken hold on me. 22 *Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?*

In these verses we have,

I. God threatening the destruction of a sinful people. He has borne long with them, but they are still more and more provoking, and therefore now their ruin is resolved on: *I will surely consume them* (v. 13), *consuming I will consume them*, not only surely, but utterly, consume them, will follow them with one judgment after another, till they are quite consumed; it is a *consumption determined*, Isa. x. 23. 1. They shall be quite stripped of all their comforts (v. 13): *There shall be no grapes on the vine*. Some understand this as intimating their sin; God came looking for grapes from this vineyard, seeking fruit upon this fig-tree, but he *found none* (as Isa. v. 2, Luke xiii. 6); nay, they had not so much as leaves, Matt. xxi. 19. But it is rather to be understood of God's judgments upon them, and may be meant literally—The enemy shall seize the fruits of the earth, shall pluck the grapes and figs for themselves and beat down the very leaves with them; or, rather, figuratively—They shall be deprived of all their comforts and shall have nothing left them wherewith to *make glad their hearts*. It is expounded in the last clause: *The things that I have given them shall pass away from*

them. Note, God's gifts are upon condition, and revocable upon non-performance of the condition. Mercies abused are forfeited, and it is just with God to take the forfeiture. 2. They shall be set upon by all manner of grievances, and surrounded with calamities (v. 17): *I will send serpents among you, the Chaldean army, fiery serpents, flying serpents, cockatrices; these shall bite them with their venomous teeth, give them wounds that shall be mortal; and they shall not be charmed*, as some serpents used to be, with music. These are serpents of another nature, that are not so wrought upon; or they are as the *deaf adder, that stops her ear, and will not hear the voice of the charmer*. The enemies are so intent upon making slaughter that it will be to no purpose to accost them gently, or offer any thing to pacify them, or mollify them, or to bring them to a better temper. No peace with God, therefore none with them.

II. The people sinking into despair under the pressure of those calamities. Those that were void of fear (when the trouble was at a distance) and set it at defiance, are void of hope now that it breaks in upon them, and have no heart either to make head against it or to bear up under it, v. 14. They cannot think themselves safe in the open villages: *Why do we sit still here? Let us assemble, and go in a body into the defended cities*. Though they could expect no other than to be surely cut off there at last, yet not so soon as in the country, and therefore, *"Let us go, and be silent there; let us attempt nothing, nor so much as make a complaint; for to what purpose?"* It is not a submissive, but a sullen silence, that they here condemn themselves to. Those that are most jovial in their prosperity commonly despond most, and are most melancholy, in trouble. Now observe what it is that sinks them.

1. They are sensible that God is angry with them: *"The Lord our God has put us to silence, has struck us with astonishment, and given us water of gall to drink*, which is both bitter and stupifying, or intoxicating. Ps. lx. 3, *Thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment*. We had better sit still than rise up and fall; better say nothing than say nothing to the purpose. To what purpose is it to contend with our fate when God himself has become our enemy and fights against us? *Because we have sinned against the Lord*, therefore we are brought to this plunge." This may be taken as the language, (1.) Of their indignation. They seem to quarrel with God as if he had dealt hardly with them in putting them to silence, not permitting them to speak for themselves, and then telling them that it was because they had sinned against him. Thus men's foolishness perverts their way, and then their hearts fret against the Lord. Or rather, (2.) Of their convictions. At length they

begin to see the hand of God lifted up against them, and stretched out in the calamities under which they are now groaning, and to own that they have provoked him to contend with them. Note, Sooner or later God will bring the most obstinate to acknowledge both his providence and his justice in all the troubles they are brought into, to see and say both that it is his hand and that he is righteous.

2. They are sensible that the enemy is likely to be too hard for them, v. 16. They are soon apprehensive that it is to no purpose to make head against such a mighty force; they and their people are quite dispirited; and, when the courage of a nation is gone, their numbers will stand them in little stead. *The snorting of the horses was heard from Dan*, that is, the report of the formidable strength of their cavalry was soon carried all the nation over and every body trembled at the sound of the neighing of his steeds; for they have come, and there is no opposing them; they have devoured the land and all that is in the city; both town and country are laid waste before them, not only the wealth, but the inhabitants, of both, those that dwell therein. Note, When God appears against us, every thing else that is against us appears very formidable; whereas, if he be for us, every thing appears very despicable, Rom. viii. 31.

3. They are disappointed in their expectations of deliverance out of their troubles, as they had been surprised when their troubles came upon them; and this double disappointment very much aggravated their calamity. (1.) The trouble came when they little expected it (v. 15): *We looked for peace*, the continuance of our peace, but no good came, no good news from abroad; we looked for a time of health and prosperity to our nation, but, behold, trouble, the alarms of war; for, as it follows (v. 16), *the noise of the enemies' horses was heard from Dan*. Their false prophets had cried *Peace, peace*, to them, which made it the more terrible when the scene of war opened on a sudden. This complaint will occur again, ch. xiv. 19. (2.) The deliverance did not come when they had long expected it (v. 20): *The harvest is past, the summer is ended*; that is, there is a great deal of time gone. Harvest and summer are parts of the year, and when they are gone the year draws towards a conclusion; so the meaning is, "One year passes after another, one campaign after another, and yet our affairs are in as bad a posture as ever they were; no relief comes, nor is any thing done towards it: *We are not saved*." Nay, there is a great deal of opportunity lost, the season of action is over and slipped, the summer and harvest are gone, and a cold and melancholy winter succeeds. Note, The salvation of God's church and people often goes on very slowly, and God keeps his people long in the ex-



pectation of it, for wise and holy ends. Nay, they stand in their own light, and put a bar in their own door, and are not saved because they are not ready for salvation.

4. They are deceived in those things which were their confidence and which they thought would have secured their peace to them (v. 19): *The daughter of my people cries, cries aloud, because of those that dwell in a far country*, because of the foreign enemy that invades them, that comes from a far country to take possession of ours; this occasions the cry; and what is the cry? It is this: *Is not the Lord in Zion? Is not her king in her?* These were the two things that they had all along buoyed up themselves with and depended upon, (1.) That they had among them the temple of God, and the tokens of his special presence with them. The common cant was, "*Is not the Lord in Zion? What danger then need we fear?*" And they held by this when the trouble was breaking in upon them. "Surely we shall do well enough, for have we not God among us?" But, when it grew to an extremity, it was an aggravation of their misery that they had thus flattered themselves. (2.) That they had the throne of the house of David. As they had a temple, so they had a monarchy, *jure divino—by divine right: Is not Zion's king in her?* And will not Zion's God protect Zion's king and his kingdom? Surely he will; but why does he not? "What" (say they) "has Zion neither a God nor a king to stand by her and help her, that she is thus run down and likely to be ruined?" This outcry of theirs reflects upon God, as if his power and promise were broken or weakened; and therefore he returns an answer to it immediately: *Why have they provoked me to anger with their graven images?* They quarrel with God as if he had dealt unkindly by them in forsaking them, whereas they by their idolatry had driven him from them; they have withdrawn from their allegiance to him, and so have thrown themselves out of his protection. *They fret themselves, and curse their king and their God* (Isa. viii. 21), when it is their own sin that separates between them and God (Isa. lix. 2); they feared not the Lord, and then what can a king do for them? Hos. x. 3.

III. We have here the prophet himself bewailing the calamity and ruin of his people; for there were more of the lamentations of Jeremiah than those we find in the book that bears that title. Observe here, 1. How great his griefs were. He was an eyewitness of the desolations of his country, and saw those things which by the spirit of prophecy he had foreseen. In the foresight, much more in the sight, of them, he cries out, "*My heart is faint in me, I sink, I die away at the consideration of it, v. 18. When I would comfort myself against my sorrow, I do but labour in vain; nay, every attempt to alleviate the grief does but aggravate it.*"

It is our wisdom and duty, under mournful events, to do what we can to *comfort ourselves against our sorrow*, by suggesting to ourselves such considerations as are proper to allay the grief and balance the grievance. But sometimes the sorrow is such that the more it is repressed the more strongly it recoils. This may sometimes be the case of very good men, as of the prophet here, whose soul refused to be comforted and fainted at the cordial, Ps. lxxvii. 2, 3. He tells us (v. 21) what was the matter: "*It is for the hurt of the daughter of my people that I am thus hurt*"; it is for their sin, and the miseries they have brought upon themselves by it; it is for this that *I am black*, that I look black, that I go in black as mourners do, and that *astonishment has taken hold on me*, so that I know not what to do nor which way to turn." Note, The miseries of our country ought to be very much the grief of our souls. A gracious spirit will be a public spirit, a tender spirit, a mourning spirit. It becomes us to lament the miseries of our fellow-creatures, much more to lay to heart the calamities of our country, and especially of the church of God, to *grieve for the affliction of Joseph*. Jeremiah had prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem, and, though the truth of his prophecy was questioned, yet he did not rejoice in the proof of the truth of it by the accomplishment of it, preferring the welfare of his country before his own reputation. If Jerusalem had repented and been spared, he would have been far from fretting as Jonah did. Jeremiah had many enemies in Judah and Jerusalem, that hated, and reproached, and persecuted him; and in the judgments brought upon them God reckoned with them for it and pleaded his prophet's cause; yet he was far from rejoicing in it, so truly did he forgive his enemies and desire that God would forgive them. 2. How small his hopes were (v. 22): "*Is there no balm in Gilead—no medicine proper for a sick and dying kingdom? Is there no physician there—no skilful faithful hand to apply the medicine?*" He looks upon the case to be deplorable and past relief. There is no balm in Gilead that can cure the disease of sin, no physician there that can restore the health of a nation quite overrun by such a foreign army as that of the Chaldeans. The desolations made are irreparable, and the disease has presently come to such a height that there is no checking it. Or this verse may be understood as laying all the blame of the incurableness of their disease upon themselves; and so the question must be answered affirmatively: *Is there no balm in Gilead—no physician there?* Yes, certainly there is; God is able to help and heal them, there is a sufficiency in him to redress all their grievances. Gilead was a place in their own land, not far off. They had among themselves God's law and his prophets, with

the help of which they might have been brought to repentance, and their ruin might have been prevented. They had princes and priests, whose business it was to reform the nation and redress their grievances. What could have been done more than had been done for their recovery? *Why then was not their health restored?* Certainly it was not owing to God, but to themselves; it was not for want of balm and a physician, but because they would not admit the application nor submit to the methods of cure. The physician and physic were both ready, but the patient was wilful and irregular, would not be tied to rules, but must be humoured. Note, If sinners die of their wounds, their blood is upon their own heads. The blood of Christ is balm in Gilead, his Spirit is the physician there, both sufficient, all-sufficient, so that they might have been healed, but would not.

## CHAP. IX.

In this chapter the prophet goes on faithfully to reprove sin and to threaten God's judgments for it, and yet bitterly to lament both, as one that neither rejoiced at iniquity nor was glad at calamities. I. He here expresses his great grief for the miseries of Judah and Jerusalem, and his detestation of their sins, which brought those miseries upon them, ver. 1.—11. II. He justifies God in the greatness of the destruction brought upon them, ver. 9.—16. III. He calls upon others to bewail the woeful case of Judah and Jerusalem, ver. 17.—22. IV. He shows them the folly and vanity of trusting in their own strength or wisdom, or the privileges of their circumcision, or any thing but God only, ver. 23.—26.

**O**H that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people! 2 Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging-place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them! for they *be* all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men. 3 And they bend their tongues *like* their bow *for* lies: but they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me, saith the LORD. 4 Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother: for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbour will walk with slanders. 5 And they will deceive every one his neighbour, and will not speak the truth: they have taught their tongue to speak lies, and weary themselves to commit iniquity. 6 Thine habitation *is* in the midst of deceit; through deceit they refuse to know me, saith the LORD. 7 Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, Behold, I will melt them, and try them; for how shall I do for the daughter of my people? 8 Their tongue *is* as

an arrow shot out; it speaketh deceit: *one* speaketh peaceably to his neighbour with his mouth, but in heart he layeth his wait. 9 Shall I not visit them for these *things*? saith the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? 10 For the mountains will I take up a weeping and wailing, and for the habitations of the wilderness a lamentation, because they are burned up, so that none can pass through *them*; neither can *men* hear the voice of the cattle; both the fowl of the heavens and the beast are fled; they are gone. 11 And I will make Jerusalem heaps, and a den of dragons; and I will make the cities of Judah desolate, without an inhabitant.

The prophet, being commissioned both to foretell the destruction coming upon Judah and Jerusalem and to point out the sin for which that destruction was brought upon them, here, as elsewhere, speaks of both very feelingly: what he said of both came from the heart, and therefore one would have thought it would reach to the heart.

I. He abandons himself to sorrow in consideration of the calamitous condition of his people, which he sadly laments, as one that preferred Jerusalem before his chief joy and her grievances before his chief sorrows.

1. He laments the slaughter of the persons, the blood shed and the lives lost (v. 1): "*O that my head were waters, quite melted and dissolved with grief, that so my eyes might be fountains of tears, weeping abundantly, continually, and without intermission, still sending forth fresh floods of tears as there still occur fresh occasions for them!*" The same word in Hebrew signifies both *the eye* and *a fountain*, as if in this land of sorrows our eyes were designed rather for weeping than seeing. Jeremiah wept much, and yet wished he could weep more, that he might affect a stupid people and rouse them to a due sense of the hand of God gone out against them. Note, It becomes us, while we are here in this vale of tears, to conform to the temper of the climate and to sow in tears. *Blessed are those that mourn, for they shall be comforted hereafter*; but let them expect that while they are here *the clouds will still return after the rain*. While we find our hearts such fountains of sin, it is fit that our eyes should be fountains of tears. But Jeremiah's grief here is upon the public account: he would *weep day and night*, not so much for the death of his own near relations, but *for the slain of the daughter of his people*, the multitudes of his countrymen that fell by the sword of war. Note, When we hear of the numbers of the slain in great battles and sieges we ought to be



much affected with the intelligence, and not to make a light matter of it; yea, though they be not of the daughter of our people, for, whatever people they are of, they are of the same human nature with us, and there are so many precious lives lost, as dear to them as ours to us, and so many precious souls gone into eternity.

2. He laments the desolations of the country. This he brings in (v. 10), for impassioned mourners are not often very methodical in their discourses: "Not only for the towns and cities, but for the mountains, will I take up a weeping and wailing" (not barren mountains, but the fruitful hills with which Judea abounded), and for the habitations of the wilderness, or rather the pastures of the plain, that used to be clothed with flocks or covered over with corn, and a goodly sight it was; but now they are burnt up by the Chaldean army (which, according to the custom of war, destroyed the forage and carried off all the cattle), so that no one dares to pass through them, for fear of meeting with some parties of the enemy, no one cares to pass through them, every thing looks so melancholy and frightful, no one has any business to pass through them, for they hear not the voice of the cattle there as usual, the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen, that grateful music to the owners; nay, both the fowl of the heavens and the beasts have fled, either frightened away by the rude noises and terrible fires which the enemies make, or forced away because there is no subsistence for them. Note, God has many ways of turning a fruitful land into barrenness for the wickedness of those that dwell therein; and the havoc war makes in a country cannot but be for a lamentation to all tender spirits, for it is a tragedy which destroys the stage it is acted on.

II. He abandons himself to solitude, in consideration of the scandalous character and conduct of his people. Though he dwells in Judah where God is known, in Salem where his tabernacle is, yet he is ready to cry out, *Woe is me that I sojourn in Mesech!* Ps. cxx. 5. While all his neighbours are fleeing to the defenced cities, and Jerusalem especially, in dread of the enemies' rage (ch. iv. 5, 6), he is contriving to retire into some desert, in detestation of his people's sin (v. 2): "O that I had in the wilderness a lodging-place of wayfaring men, such a lonely cottage to dwell in as they have in the deserts of Arabia, which are uninhabited, for travellers to repose themselves in, that I might leave my people and go from them!" Not only because of the ill usage they gave him (he would rather venture himself among the wild beasts of the desert than among such treacherous barbarous people), but principally because his righteous soul was vexed from day to day, as Lot's was in Sodom, with the wickedness of their conversation, 2 Pet. ii. 7, 8. This does not imply any intention or resolution that he

had thus to retire. God had cut him out work among them, which he must not quit for his own ease. We must not go out of the world, bad as it is, before our time. If he could not reform them, he could bear a testimony against them; if he could not do good to many, yet he might to some. But it intimates the temptation he was in to leave them, involves a threatening that they should be deprived of his ministry, and especially expresses the holy indignation he had against their abominable wickedness, which continued notwithstanding all the pains he had taken with them to reclaim them. It made him even weary of his life to see them dishonouring God as they did and destroying themselves. Time was when the place which God had chosen to put his name there was the desire and delight of good men. David, in a wilderness, longed to be again in the courts of God's house; but now Jeremiah, in the courts of God's house (for there he was when he said this), wishes himself in a wilderness. Those have made themselves very miserable that have made God's people and ministers weary of them and willing to get from them. Now, to justify his willingness to leave them, he shows,

1. What he himself had observed among them.

(1.) He would not think of leaving them because they were poor and in distress, but because they were wicked. [1.] They were filthy: *They are all adulterers*, that is, the generality of them are, ch. v. 8. They all either practised this sin or connived at those that did. Lewdness and uncleanness constituted that crying sin of Sodom at which righteous Lot was vexed in soul, and it is a sin that renders men loathsome in the eyes of God and all good men; it makes men an abomination. [2.] They were false. This is the sin that is most enlarged upon here. Those that had been unfaithful to their God were so to one another, and it was a part of their punishment as well as their sin, for even those that love to cheat, yet hate to be cheated. First, Go into their solemn meetings for the exercises of religion, for the administration of justice, or for commerce—to church, to court, or to the exchange—and they are an assembly of treacherous men; they are so by consent, they strengthen one another's hands in doing any thing that is perfidious. There they will cheat deliberately and industriously, with design, with a malicious design, for (v. 3) *they bend their tongues, like their bow, for lies*, with a great deal of craft; their tongues are fitted for lying, as a bow that is bent is for shooting, and are as constantly used for that purpose. Their tongue turns as naturally to a lie as the bow to the string. But they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth. Their tongues are like a bow strung, with which they might do good service if they would use the art and resolution which they are so much masters



of in the cause of truth ; but they will not do so. They appear not in defence of the truths of God, which were delivered to them by the prophets ; but even those that could not deny them to be truths were content to see them run down. In the administration of justice they have not courage to stand by an honest cause that has truth on its side, if greatness and power be on the other side. Those that will be faithful to the truth must be valiant for it, and not be daunted by the opposition given to it, nor fear the face of man. *They are not valiant for the truth in the land*, the land which has truth for the glory of it. Truth has fallen in the land, and they dare not lend a hand to help it up, Isa. lix. 14, 15. We must answer, another day, not only for our enmity in opposing truth, but for our cowardice in defending it. *Secondly*, Go into their families, and you will find they will cheat their own brethren (*every brother will utterly supplant*) ; they will trip up one another's heels if they can, for they lie at the catch to seek all advantages against those they hope to make a hand of. Jacob had his name from *supplanting* ; it is the word here used ; they followed him in his name, but not in his true character, *without guile*. So very false are they that you cannot *trust in a brother*, but must stand as much upon your guard as if you were dealing with a stranger, with a Canaanite that has *balances of deceit in his hand*. Things have come to an ill pass indeed when a man cannot put confidence in his own brother. *Thirdly*, Go into company and observe both their commerce and their conversation, and you will find there is nothing of sincerity or common honesty among them. *Nec hospes ab hospite tutus—The host and the guest are in danger from each other*. The best advice a wise man can give you is to *take heed every one of his neighbour*, nay, of his *friend* (so some read it), of him whom he has befriended and who pretends friendship to him. No man thinks himself bound to be either grateful or sincere. Take them in their conversation and *every neighbour will walk with slander* ; they care not what ill they say one of another, though ever so false ; that way that the slander goes they will go ; they will *walk with it*. They will walk about from house to house too, carrying slanders along with them, all the ill-natured stories they can pick up or invent to make mischief. Take them in their trading and bargaining, and *they will deceive every one his neighbour*, will say any thing, though they know it to be false, for their own advantage. Nay, they will lie for lying sake, to keep their tongues in use to it, for *they will not speak the truth*, but will tell a deliberate lie and laugh at it when they have done.

(2.) That which aggravates the sin of this false and lying generation is, [1.] That they are ingenious to sin : *They have taught their tongue to speak lies*, implying that through

the reluctances of natural conscience they found it difficult to bring themselves to it. Their tongue would have spoken truth, but *they taught it to speak lies*, and by degrees have made themselves masters of the art of lying, and have got such a habit of it that use has made it a second nature to them. They learnt it when they were young (*for the wicked are estranged from the womb, speaking lies*, Ps. lviii. 3), and now they have grown dexterous at it. [2.] That they are industrious to sin : *They weary themselves to commit iniquity* ; they put a force upon their consciences to bring themselves to it ; they tire out their convictions by offering them continual violence, and they take a great deal of pains, till they have even spent themselves in bringing about their malicious designs. They are wearied with their sinful pursuits and yet not weary of them. The service of sin is a perfect drudgery ; men run themselves out of breath in it, and put themselves to a great deal of toil to damn their own souls. [3.] That they grow worse and worse (v. 3) : *They proceed from evil to evil*, from one sin to another, from one degree of sin to another. They began with less sins. *Nemo repente fit turpissimus—No one reaches the height of vice at once*. They began with equivocating and bantering, but at last came to downright lying. And they are now proceeding to greater sins yet, for *they know not me, saith the Lord* ; and where men have no knowledge of God, or no consideration of what they have known of him, what good can be expected from them ? Men's ignorance of God is the cause of all their ill conduct one towards another.

2. The prophet shows what God had informed him of their wickedness, and what he had determined against them.

(1.) God had marked their sin. He could tell the prophet (and he speaks of it with compassion) what sort of people they were that he had to deal with. *I know thy works, and where thou dwellest*, Rev. ii. 13. So here (v. 6) : "*Thy habitation is in the midst of deceit*, all about thee are addicted to it ; therefore stand upon thy guard." If *all men are liars*, it concerns us to *beware of men*, and to be *wise as serpents*. They are deceitful men ; therefore there is little hope of thy doing any good among them ; for, make things ever so plain, they have some trick or other wherewith to shuffle off their convictions. This charge is enlarged upon, v. 8. Their tongue was a *bow bent* (v. 3), plotting and preparing mischief ; here it is *an arrow shot out*, putting in execution what they had projected. It is as a *slaying arrow* (so some readings of the original have it) ; their tongue has been to many an instrument of death. They *speak peaceably to their neighbours*, against whom they are at the same time *lying in wait* ; as Joab kissed Abner when he was about to kill him, and Cain, that he might not be suspected of any ill design, *talked with*



his brother, freely and familiarly. Note, Fair words, when they are not attended with good intentions, are despicable, but, when they are intended as a cloak and cover for wicked intentions, they are abominable. While they did all this injury to one another they put a great contempt upon God: "Not only they know not me, but (v. 6) *through deceit*, through the delusions of the false prophets, *they refuse to know me*; they are so cheated into a good opinion of their own ways, the ways of their own heart, that they desire not the knowledge of my ways." Or, "They are so wedded to this sinful course which they are in, and so bewitched with that, and its gains, that they will by no means admit the *knowledge of God*, because that would be a check upon them in their sins." This is the ruin of sinners: they might be taught the good knowledge of the Lord and they will not learn it; and where no knowledge of God is, what good can be expected? Hos. iv. 1.

(2.) He had marked them for ruin, v. 7, 9, 11. Those that will not know God as their lawgiver shall be made to know him as their judge. God determines here to bring his judgments upon them, for the refining of some and the ruining of the rest. [1.] Some shall be refined (v. 7): "Because they are thus corrupt, *behold, I will melt them and try them*, will bring them into trouble and see what that will do towards bringing them to repentance, whether the furnace of affliction will purify them from their dross, and whether, when they are melted, they will be new-cast in a better mould." He will make trial of less afflictions before he brings upon them utter destruction; for he *desires not the death of sinners*. They shall not be rejected as reprobate silver till the founder has melted in vain, ch. vi. 29, 30. *For how shall I do for the daughter of my people?* He speaks as one consulting with himself what to do with them that might be for the best, and as one that could not find in his heart to cast them off and give them up to ruin till he had first tried all means likely to bring them to repentance. Or, "*How else shall I do for them?*" They have grown so very corrupt that there is no other way with them but to put them into the furnace; what other course can I take with them? Isa. v. 4, 5. It is *the daughter of my people*, and I must do something to vindicate my own honour, which will be reflected upon if I connive at their wickedness. I must do something to reduce and reform them." A parent corrects his own children because they are his own. Note, When God afflicts his people, it is with a gracious design to mollify and reform them; it is but when need is and when he knows it is the best method he can use. [2.] The rest shall be ruined (v. 9): *Shall I not visit for these things?* Fraud and falsehood are sins which God hates and which he will reckon for. "*Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as*

*this*, that is so universally corrupt, and, by its impudence in sin, even dares and defies divine vengeance? The sentence is passed, the decree has gone forth (v. 11): *I will make Jerusalem heaps of rubbish, and lay it in such ruins that it shall be fit for nothing but to be a den of dragons; and the cities of Judah shall be a desolation.*" God makes them so, for he gives the enemy warrant and power to do it: but why is the holy city made a heap? The answer is ready, Because it has become an unholy one?

12 Who *is* the wise man, that may understand this? And *who is he* to whom the mouth of the Lord hath spoken, that he may declare it, for what the land perisheth *and is burned up like a wilderness*, that none passeth through? 13 And the Lord saith, Because they have forsaken my law which I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice, neither walked therein; 14 But have walked after the imagination of their own heart, and after Baalim, which their fathers taught them: 15 Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will feed them, *even this people*, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink. 16 I will scatter them also among the heathen, whom neither they nor their fathers have known: and I will send a sword after them, till I have consumed them. 17 Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider ye, and call for the mourning women, that they may come; and send for cunning women, that they may come: 18 And let them make haste, and take up a wailing for us, that our eyes may run down with tears, and our eye-lids gush out with waters. 19 For a voice of wailing is heard out of Zion, How are we spoiled! we are greatly confounded, because we have forsaken the land, because our dwellings have cast us out. 20 Yet hear the word of the Lord, O ye women, and let your ear receive the word of his mouth, and teach your daughters wailing, and every one her neighbour lamentation. 21 For death is come up into our windows, *and is entered into our palaces*, to cut off the children from without, *and the young men from the streets*. 22 Speak, Thus saith the Lord, Even the

carcasses of men shall fall as dung upon the open field, and as the handful after the harvestman, and none shall gather *them*.

Two things the prophet designs, in these verses, with reference to the approaching destruction of Judah and Jerusalem:—1. To convince people of the justice of God in it, that they had by sin brought it upon themselves and that therefore they had no reason to quarrel with God, who did them no wrong at all, but a great deal of reason to fall out with their sins, which did them all this mischief. 2. To affect people with the greatness of the desolation that was coming, and the miserable effects of it, that by a terrible prospect of it they might be awakened to repentance and reformation, which was the only way to prevent it, or, at least, mitigate their own share in it. This being designed,

I. He calls for the thinking men, by them to show people the equity of God's proceedings, though they seemed harsh and severe (v. 12): "*Who, where, is the wise man, or the prophet, to whom the mouth of the Lord hath spoken? You boast of your wisdom, and of the prophets you have among you; produce me any one that has but the free use of human reason or any acquaintance with divine revelation, and he will soon understand this himself, and it will be so clear to him that he will be ready to declare it to others, that there is a just ground of God's controversy with this people.*" Do these wiser men enquire, *For what does the land perish?* What is the matter, that such a change is made with this land? It used to be a land that God cared for, and he had his eyes upon it for good (Deut. xi. 12), but it is now a land that he has forsaken and that his face is against. It used to flourish as the garden of the Lord and to be replenished with inhabitants; but now it is burnt up like a wilderness, that *none passeth through* it, much less cares to settle in it. It was supposed, long ago, that it would be asked, when it came to this, *Wherefore has the Lord done thus unto this land? What means the heat of this great anger?* (Deut. xxix. 24), to which question God here gives a full answer, before which all flesh must be silent. He produces out of the record,

1. The indictment preferred and proved against them, upon which they had been found guilty, v. 13, 14. It is charged upon them, and it cannot be denied, (1.) That they have revolted from their allegiance to their rightful Sovereign. *Therefore God has forsaken their land*, and justly, because they have *forsaken his law*, which he had so plainly, so fully, so frequently *set before them*, and had not observed his orders, not *obeyed his voice*, nor *walked in the ways* that he had appointed. Here their wickedness began, in the omission of their duty to their God and a con-

tempt of his authority. But it did not end here. It is further charged upon them, (2.) That they have entered themselves into the service of pretenders and usurpers, have not only withdrawn themselves from their obedience to their prince, but have taken up arms against him. For, [1.] They have acted according to the dictates of their own lusts, have set up their own will, the wills of the flesh, and the carnal mind, in competition with, and contradiction to, the will of God: *They have walked after the imagination of their own hearts*; they would do as they pleased, whatever God and conscience said to the contrary. [2.] They have worshipped the creatures of their own fancy, the work of their own hands, according to the tradition received from their fathers: *They have walked after Baalim*: the word is plural; they had many Baals, Baal-peor and Baal-berith, the Baal of this place and the Baal of the other place; for they had *lords many*, which *their fathers taught them* to worship, but which the God of their fathers had again and again forbidden. This was it for which *the land perished*. The King of kings never makes war thus upon his own subjects but when they treacherously depart from him and rebel against him, and it has become necessary by this means to chastise their rebellion and reduce them to their allegiance; and they themselves shall at length acknowledge that he is just in all that is brought upon them.

2. The judgment given upon this indictment, the sentence upon the convicted rebels, which must now be executed, for it was righteous and nothing could be moved in arrest of it: *The Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, hath said it* (v. 15, 16), and who can reverse it? (1.) That all their comforts at home shall be poisoned and embittered to them: *I will feed this people with wormwood* (or rather with *wolf's-bane*, for it signifies a herb that is not wholesome, as wormwood is though it be bitter, but some herb that is both nauseous and noxious), and *I will give them water of gall* (or *juice of hemlock* or some other herb that is poisonous) to drink. Every thing about them, till it comes to their very meat and drink, shall be a terror and torment to them. God will *curse their blessings*, Mal. ii. 2. (2.) That their dispersion abroad shall be their destruction (v. 16): *I will scatter them among the heathen*. They were corrupted and debauched by their intimacy with the heathen, with whom they mingled and *learned their works*; and now they shall lose themselves, where they lost their virtue, *among the heathen*; they had violated the laws of that truth which is the bond and cement of society and commerce, and addicted themselves to deceit and lying, and therefore are justly crumbled to dust and scattered among the heathen. They set up gods which *neither they nor their fathers had known*, strange gods, new gods (Deut.



xxxii. 17); and now God will put them among neighbours whom *neither they nor their fathers have known*, whom they can claim no acquaintance with, and therefore can expect no favour from. And yet, though they are scattered so as that they will not know where to find one another, God will know where to find them all out (Ps. xxi. 8) with that evil which still pursues impenitent sinners: *I will send a sword after them*, some killing judgment or other. *till I have consumed them*; for when God judges he will overcome, when he pursues he will overtake. And now we see for what the land perishes; all this desolation is the desert of their deeds and the performance of God's words.

II. He calls for the mourning women, and engages them, with the arts they practise to affect people and move their passions, to lament these sad calamities that had come or were coming upon them, that the nation might be alarmed to prepare for them: *The Lord of hosts himself says, Call for the mourning women, that they may come*, v. 17. The scope of this is to show how very woeful and lamentable the condition of this people was likely to be. 1. Here is work for the counterfeit mourners: *Send for the cunning women*, that know how to compose mournful ditties, or at least to sing them in mournful tunes and accents, and therefore are made use of at funerals to supply the want of true mourners. Let these *take up a wailing* for us, v. 18. The deaths and funerals were so many that people wept for them till they *had no more power to weep*, as those, 1 Sam. xxx. 4. Let those therefore do it now whose trade it is. Or, rather, it intimates the extreme sottishness and stupidity of the people, that laid not to heart the judgments they were under, nor, even when there was so much blood shed, could find in their hearts to shed a tear. *They cry not when God binds them*, Job xxxvi. 13. God sent his mourning prophets to them, to call them to weeping and mourning, but his word in their mouths did not work upon their faith; rather therefore than they shall go laughing to their ruin, let the mourning women come, and try to work upon their fancy, *that their eyes may at length run down with tears, and their eyelids gush out with waters*. First or last, sinners must be weepers. 2. Here is work for the real mourners. (1.) There is that which is a lamentation. The present scene is very tragical (v. 19): *A voice of wailing is heard out of Zion*. Some make this to be the song of the mourning women: it is rather an echo to it, returned by those whose affections were moved by their wailings. In Zion the voice of joy and praise used to be heard, while the people kept closely to God. But sin has altered the note; it is now the *voice of lamentation*. It should seem to be the voice of those who fled from all parts of the country to the castle of Zion

for protection. Instead of rejoicing that they had got safely thither, they lamented that they were forced to seek for shelter there: *"How are we spoiled! How are we stripped of all our possessions! We are greatly confounded, ashamed of ourselves and our poverty;"* for that is it that they complain of, that is it that they blush at the thoughts of, rather than of their sin: *We are confounded because we have forsaken the land* (forced so to do by the enemy), not because we have forsaken the Lord, being drawn aside of our own lust and enticed—*because our dwellings have cast us out*, not because our God has cast us off. Thus unhumiliated hearts lament their calamity, but not their iniquity, the procuring cause of it. (2.) There is more still to come which shall be for a lamentation. Things are bad, but they are likely to be worse. Those whose land has *spued them out* (as it did their predecessors the Canaanites, and justly, because they trod in their steps, Lev. xviii. 28) complain that they are driven into the city, but, after a while, those of the city, and they with them, shall be forced thence too: *Yet hear the word of the Lord*; he has something more to say to you (v. 20); let the women hear it, whose tender spirits are apt to receive the impressions of grief and fear, for the men will not heed it, will not give it a patient hearing. The prophets will be glad to preach to a congregation of women that *tremble at God's word*. Let your ear receive the word of God's mouth, and bid it welcome, though it be a word of terror. Let the women *teach their daughters wailing*; this intimates that the trouble shall last long, grief shall be entailed upon the generation to come. Young people are apt to love mirth, and expect mirth, and are disposed to be gay and airy; but let the elder women teach the younger to be serious, tell them what a vale of tears they must expect to find this world, and train them up among the mourners in Zion, Tit. ii. 4, 5. Let every one teach her neighbour lamentation; this intimates that the trouble shall spread far, shall go from house to house. People shall not need to sympathize with their friends; they shall all have cause enough to mourn for themselves. Note, Those that are themselves affected with the terrors of the Lord should endeavour to affect others with them. The judgment here threatened is made to look terrible. [1.] Multitudes shall be slain, v. 21. Death shall ride in triumph, and there shall be no escaping his arrests when he comes with commission, neither within doors nor without. Not within doors, for let the doors be shut ever so fast, let them be ever so firmly locked and bolted, *death comes up into our windows*, like a thief in the night; it steals upon us ere we are aware. Nor does it thus boldly attack the cottages only, but it has entered into our palaces, the palaces of our princes and great men, though ever so stately, ever so strongly built and guarded. Note,

No palaces can keep out death. Nor are those more safe that are abroad; death cuts off even the children from without and the young men from the streets. The children who might have been spared by the enemy in pity, because they had never been hurtful to them, and the young men who might have been spared in policy, because capable of being serviceable to them, shall fall together by the sword. It is usual now, even in the severest military executions, to put none to the sword but those that are found in arms; but then even the boys and girls playing in the streets were sacrificed to the fury of the conqueror. [2.] Those that are slain shall be left unburied (v. 22): *Speak, Thus saith the Lord* (for the confirmation and aggravation of what was before said), *Even the carcasses of men shall fall as dung, neglected, and left to be offensive to the smell, as dung is.* Common humanity obliges the survivors to bury the dead, even for their own sake; but here such numbers shall be slain, and those so dispersed all the country over, that it shall be an endless thing to bury them all, nor shall there be hands enough to do it, nor shall the conquerors permit it, and those that should do it shall be overwhelmed with grief, so that they shall have no heart to do it. The dead bodies even of the fairest and strongest, when they have lain awhile, become as dung, such vile bodies have we. And here such multitudes shall fall that their bodies shall lie as thick as heaps of dung in the furrows of the field, and no more notice shall be taken of them than of the handfuls which the harvestman drops for the gleaners, for none shall gather them, but they shall remain in sight, monuments of divine vengeance, that the eye of the impenitent survivors may affect their heart. *Slay them not, bury them not, lest my people forget,* Ps. lix. 11.

23 Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: 24 But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD. 25 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will punish all them which are circumcised with the uncircumcised; 26 Egypt, and Judah, and Edom, and the children of Ammon, and Moab, and all that are in the utmost corners, that dwell in the wilderness: for all these nations are uncircumcised, and

all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart.

The prophet had been endeavouring to possess this people with a holy fear of God and his judgments, to convince them both of sin and wrath; but still they had recourse to some sorry subterfuge or other, under which to shelter themselves from the conviction and with which to excuse themselves in their obstinacy and carelessness. He therefore sets himself here to drive them from these refuges of lies and to show them the insufficiency of them.

I. When they were told how inevitable the judgment would be they pleaded the defence of their politics and powers, which, with the help of their wealth and treasure, they thought made their city impregnable. In answer to this he shows them the folly of trusting to and boasting of all these stays, while they have not a God in covenant to stay themselves upon, v. 23, 24. Here he shows, 1. What we may not depend upon in a day of distress: *Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom* as if with the help of that he could outwit or countermince the enemy, or in the greatest extremity find out some evasion or other; for a man's wisdom may fail him when he needs it most, and he may be taken in his own craftiness. Ahithophel was befooled, and counsellors are often led away spoiled. But, if a man's policies fail him, yet surely he may gain his point by might and dint of courage. No: *Let not the strong man glory in his strength*, for the battle is not always to the strong. David the stripling proves too hard for Goliath the giant. All human force is nothing without God, worse than nothing against him. But may not the rich man's wealth be his strong city? (money answers all things) No: *Let not the rich man glory in his riches*, for they may prove so far from sheltering him that they may expose him and make him the fairer mark. Let not the people boast of the wise men, and mighty men, and rich men that they have among them, as if they could make their part good against the Chaldeans because they have wise men to advise concerning the war, mighty men to fight their battles, and rich men to bear the charges of the war. Let not particular persons think to escape the common calamity by their wisdom, might, or money; for all these will prove but vain things for safety. 2. He shows what we may depend upon in a day of distress. (1.) Our only comfort in trouble will be that we have done our duty. Those that refused to know God (v. 6) will boast in vain of their wisdom and wealth; but those that know God, intelligently, that understand aright that he is the Lord, that have not only right apprehensions concerning his nature, and attributes, and relations to man, but receive and retain the impressions of them, may glory in this, it will be their rejoicing in the



day of evil. (2.) Our only confidence in trouble will be that, having through grace in some measure done our duty, we shall find God a God all-sufficient to us. We may glory in this, that, wherever we are, we have an acquaintance with and an interest in a God that *exercises lovingkindness, and judgment, and righteousness in the earth*, that is not only just to all his creatures and will do no wrong to any of them, but kind to all his children and will protect them and provide for them. *For in these things I delight.* God delights to show kindness and to execute judgment himself, and is pleased with those who herein are *followers of him as dear children*. Those that have such knowledge of the glory of God as to be changed into the same image, and to partake of his holiness, find it to be their perfection and glory; and the God they thus faithfully conform to they may cheerfully confide in, in their greatest straits. But the prophet intimates that the generality of this people took no care about this. Their wisdom, and might, and riches, were their joy and hope, which would end in grief and despair. But those few among them that had the knowledge of God might please themselves with it, and boast themselves of it; it would stand them in better stead than *thousands of gold and silver*.

II. When they were told how provoking their sins were to God they vainly pleaded the covenant of their circumcision. They were undoubtedly the people of God; as they had the temple of the Lord in their city, so they had the mark of his children in their flesh. "It is true the Chaldean army has laid such and such nations waste, because they were uncircumcised, and therefore not under the protection of the divine providence, as we are." To this the prophet answers, That the days of visitation were now at hand, in which God would punish all wicked people, without making any distinction between the circumcised and uncircumcised, *v. 25, 26*. They had by sin profaned the crown of their peculiarity, and lived in common with the uncircumcised nations, and so had forfeited the benefit of that peculiarity and must expect to fare never the better for it. God will *punish the circumcised with the uncircumcised*. As the ignorance of the uncircumcised shall not excuse their wickedness, so neither shall the privileges of the circumcised excuse theirs, but they shall be punished together. Note, The Judge of all the earth is impartial, and none shall fare the better at his bar for any external advantages, but he will render to every man, circumcised or uncircumcised, according to his works. The condemnation of impenitent sinners that are baptized will be as sure as, nay, and more severe than, that of impenitent sinners that are unbaptized. It would affect one to find here Judah industriously put between Egypt and Edom, as standing upon a level with them and under the same

doom, *v. 26*. These nations were forbidden a share in the Jews' privileges (*Deut. xxiii. 3*); but the Jews are here told that they shall share in their punishments. Those in the *utmost corners, that dwell in the wilderness*, are supposed to be the Kedarenes and those of the kingdoms of Habor, as appears by comparing *ch. xlix. 23—32*. Some think they are so called because they dwelt as it were in a corner of the world, others because they had *the hair of their head polled into corners*. However that was, they were of those nations that were uncircumcised in flesh, and the Jews are ranked with them and are as near to ruin for their sins as they; *for all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart*: they have the sign, but not the thing signified, *ch. iv. 4*. They are heathens in their hearts, strangers to God, and enemies in their minds by wicked works. Their hearts are disposed to idols, as the hearts of the uncircumcised Gentiles are. Note, The seals of the covenant, though they dignify us, and lay us under obligations, will not save us, unless the temper of our minds and the tenour of our lives agree with the covenant. That only is circumcision, and that baptism, which is of *the heart*, *Rom. ii. 28, 29*.

## CHAP. X.

We may conjecture that the prophecy of this chapter was delivered after the first captivity, in the time of Jeconiah or Jehoiachin, when many were carried away to Babylon; for it has a double reference:—I. To those that were carried away into the land of the Chaldeans, a country notorious above any other for idolatry and superstition; and they are here cautioned against the infection of the place, not to learn the way of the heathen (*ver. 1, 2*), for their astrology and idolatry are both foolish things (*ver. 3—5*), and the worshippers of idols brutish, *ver. 8, 9*. So it will appear in the day of their visitation, *ver. 14, 15*. They are likewise exhorted to adhere firmly to the God of Israel, for there is none like him, *ver. 6, 7*. He is the true God, lives for ever, and has the government of the world (*ver. 10—13*), and his people are happy in him, *ver. 16*. II. To those that yet remained in their own land. They are cautioned against security, and told to expect distress (*ver. 17, 18*) and that by a foreign enemy, which God would bring upon them for their sin, *ver. 20—22*. This calamity the prophet laments (*ver. 19*) and prays for the mitigation of it, *ver. 23—25*.

HEAR ye the word which the LORD speaketh unto you, O house of Israel: 2 Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them. 3 For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the ax. 4 They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not. 5 They are upright as the palm-tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to do good. 6 Forasmuch as there is none like unto thee, O LORD; thou

art great, and thy name *is* great in might. 7 Who would not fear thee, O King of nations? for to thee doth it appertain: forasmuch as among all the wise *men* of the nations, and in all their kingdoms, *there is* none like unto thee. 8 But they are altogether brutish and foolish: the stock *is* a doctrine of vanities. 9 Silver spread into plates is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz, the work of the workman, and of the hands of the founder: blue and purple *is* their clothing: they *are* all the work of cunning *men*. 10 But the LORD *is* the true God, he *is* the living God, and an everlasting King: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation. 11 Thus shall ye say unto them, The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, *even* they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens. 12 He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion. 13 When he uttereth his voice, *there is* a multitude of waters in the heavens, and he causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures. 14 Every man is brutish in *his* knowledge: every founder is confounded by the graven image: for his molten image *is* falsehood, and *there is* no breath in them. 15 They *are* vanity, and the work of errors: in the time of their visitation they shall perish. 16 The portion of Jacob *is* not like them: for he *is* the former of all *things*; and Israel *is* the rod of his inheritance: The LORD of hosts *is* his name.

The prophet Isaiah, when he prophesied of the captivity in Babylon, added warnings against idolatry and largely exposed the sottishness of idolaters, not only because the temptations in Babylon would be in danger of drawing the Jews there to idolatry, but because the afflictions in Babylon were designed to cure them of their idolatry. Thus the prophet Jeremiah here arms people against the idolatrous usages and customs

of the heathen, not only for the use of those that had gone to Babylon, but of those also that staid behind, that being convinced and reclaimed, by the word of God, the rod might be prevented; and it is *written for our learning*. Observe here,

I. A solemn charge given to the people of God not to conform themselves to the ways and customs of the heathen. Let the house of Israel hear and receive this word from the God of Israel: "*Learn not the way of the heathen*, do not approve of it, no, nor think indifferently concerning it, much less imitate it or accustom yourselves to it. Let not any of their customs steal in among you (as they are apt to do insensibly) nor mingle themselves with your religion." Note, It ill becomes those that are taught of God to *learn the way of the heathen*, and to think of worshipping the true God with such rites and ceremonies as they used in the worship of their false gods. See Dent. xii. 29—31. It was the way of the heathen to worship the host of heaven, the sun, moon, and stars; to them they gave divine honours, and from them they expected divine favours, and therefore, according as *the signs of heaven* were, whether they were auspicious or ominous, they thought themselves countenanced or discountenanced by their deities, which made them observe those signs, the eclipses of the sun and moon, the conjunctions and oppositions of the planets, and all the unusual phenomena of the celestial globe, with a great deal of anxiety and trembling. Business was stopped if any thing occurred that was thought to bode ill; if it did but thunder on their left hand, they were almost as if they had been thunderstruck. Now God would not have his people to be *dismayed at the signs of heaven*, to reverence the stars as deities, nor to frighten themselves with any prognostications grounded upon them. Let them fear the God of heaven, and keep up a reverence of his providence, and then they need not be *dismayed at the signs of heaven*, for the *stars in their courses* fight not against any that are at peace with God. The heathen are dismayed at these signs, for they know no better; but let not the *house of Israel*, that are taught of God, be so.

II. Divers good reasons given to enforce this charge.

1. The way of the heathen is very ridiculous and absurd, and is condemned even by the dictates of right reason, v. 3. The statutes and ordinances of the heathen are vanity itself; they cannot stand the test of a rational disquisition. This is again and again insisted upon here, as it was by Isaiah. The Chaldeans valued themselves upon their wisdom, in which they thought that they excelled all their neighbours; but the prophet here shows that they, and all others that worshipped idols and expected help and relief from them, were brutish and sottish, and had not common sense. (1.) Consider



what the idol is that is worshipped. It was a *tree cut out of the forest* originally. It was fitted up by the *hands of the workman*, squared, and sawed, and worked into shape; see Isa. xlv. 12, &c. But, after all, it was but the stock of a tree, fitter to make a gate-post of than any thing else. But, to hide the wood, *they deck it with silver and gold*, they gild or lacker it, or they deck it with gold and silver lace, or cloth of tissue. *They fasten it to its place*, which they themselves have assigned it, *with nails and hammers*, that it fall not, nor be thrown down, nor stolen away, v. 4. The image is made straight enough, and it cannot be denied but that the workman did his part, for it is *upright as the palm-tree* (v. 5); it looks stately, and stands up as if it were going to speak to you, but it *cannot speak*; it is a poor dumb creature; nor can it take one step towards your relief. If there be any occasion for it to shift its place, it must be carried in procession, for it *cannot go*. Very fitly does the admonition come in here, "*Be not afraid of them*, any more than of the signs of heaven; be not afraid of incurring their displeasure, for *they can do no evil*; be not afraid of forfeiting their favour, for *neither is it in them to do good*. If you think to mend the matter by mending the materials of which the idol is made, you deceive yourselves. Idols of gold and silver are as unworthy to be worshipped as wooden gods. *The stock is a doctrine of vanities*, v. 8. It teaches lies, teaches lies concerning God. *It is an instruction of vanities; it is wood.*" It is probable that the idols of gold and silver had wood underneath for the substratum, and then *silver spread into plates is brought from Tarshish*, imported from beyond sea, and *gold from Uphaz*, or Phaz, which is sometimes rendered the *fine* or *pure* gold, Ps. xxi. 3. A great deal of art is used, and pains taken, about it. They are not such ordinary mechanics that are employed about these as about the wooden gods, v. 3. These are cunning men; it is *the work of the workman*; the graver must do his part when it has passed through *the hands of the founder*. Those were but decked here and there with silver and gold; these are silver and gold all over. And, that these gods might be revered as kings, *blue and purple are their clothing*, the colour of royal robes (v. 9), which amuses ignorant worshippers, but makes the matter no better. For what is the idol when it is made and when they have made the best they can of it? He tells us (v. 14): *They are falsehood*; they are not what they pretend to be, but a great cheat put upon the world. They are worshipped as the gods that give us breath and life and sense, whereas they are lifeless senseless things themselves, and *there is no breath in them*; there is *no spirit in them* (so the word is); they are not animated, or inhabited, as they are supposed to be, by any *divine spirit*

or *numen—divinity*. They are so far from being gods that they have not so much as the *spirit of a beast that goes downward*. *They are vanity, and the work of errors*, v. 15. Enquire into the use of them and you will find they are vanity; they are good for nothing; no help is to be expected from them nor any confidence put in them. They are a *deceitful work, works of illusions, or mere mockeries*; so some read the following clause. *They delude those that put their trust in them, make fools of them, or, rather, they make fools of themselves*. Enquire into the rise of them and you will find they are *the work of errors*, grounded upon the grossest mistakes that ever men who pretended to reason were guilty of. They are the creatures of a deluded fancy; and the errors by which they were produced they propagate among their worshippers. (2.) Infer hence what the idolaters are that worship these idols (v. 8): *They are altogether brutish and foolish*. Those that make them are like unto them, senseless and stupid, and there is no spirit in them—no use of reason, else they would never believe in such gods—no sense of honour, else they would never stoop to them, v. 14. *Every man* that makes or worships idols has become *brutish in his knowledge*, that is, brutish for want of knowledge, or brutish in that very thing which one would think they should be fully acquainted with; compare Jude 10, *What they know naturally*, what they cannot but know by the light of nature, *in those things as brute beasts they corrupt themselves*. Though in the works of creation they cannot but see the eternal power and godhead of the Creator, yet they have become *cain in their imaginations, not liking to retain God in their knowledge*. See Rom. i. 21, 28. Nay, whereas they thought it a piece of wisdom thus to multiply gods, it really was the greatest folly they could be guilty of. *The world by wisdom knew not God*, 1 Cor. i. 21; Rom. i. 22. *Every founder is himself confounded by the graven image*; when he has made it by a mistake he is more and more confirmed in his mistake by it; he is bewildered, bewitched, and cannot disentangle himself from the snare; or it is what he will one time or other be ashamed of.

2. The God of Israel is the one only living and true God, and those that have him for their God need not make their application to any other; nay, to set up any other in competition with him is the greatest affront and injury that can be done him. Let the house of Israel cleave to the God of Israel and serve and worship him only, for,

(1.) He is a non-such. Whatever men may set in competition with him, there is none to be compared with him. The prophet turns from speaking with the utmost disdain of the idols of the heathen (as well he might) to speak with the most profound and awful reverence of the God of Israel (v. 6,



7): "Forasmuch as there is none like unto thee, O Lord! none of all the heroes which the heathen have deified and make such ado about," the dead men of whom they made dead images, and whom they worshipped. "Some were deified and adored for their wisdom; but, among all the wise men of the nations, the greatest philosophers or statesmen, as Apollo or Hermes, there is none like thee. Others were deified and adored for their dominion; but, in all their royalty" (so it may be read), "among all their kings, as Saturn and Jupiter, there is none like unto thee." What is the glory of a man that invented a useful art or founded a flourishing kingdom (and these were grounds sufficient among the heathen to entitle a man to an apotheosis) compared with the glory of him that is the Creator of the world and that forms the spirit of man within him? What is the glory of the greatest prince or potentate, compared with the glory of him whose kingdom rules over all? He acknowledges (v. 6), O Lord! thou art great, infinite and immense, and thy name is great in might; thou hast all power, and art known to have it. Men's name is often beyond their might; they are thought to be greater than they are; but God's name is great, and no greater than he really is. And therefore who would not fear thee, O King of nations? Who would not choose to worship such a God as this, that can do every thing, rather than such dead idols as the heathen worship, that can do nothing? Who would not be afraid of offending or forsaking a God whose name is so great in might? Which of all the nations, if they understood their interests aright, would not fear him who is the King of nations? Note, It is not only the house of Israel that is bound to worship the great Jehovah as the God of Israel, the King of saints (Rev. xv. 3, 4), but all the families of the earth are bound to worship him as King of nations; for to him it appertains, to him it suits and agrees. Note, There is an admirable decency and congruity in the worshipping of God only. It is fit that he who is God alone should alone be served, that he who is Lord of all should be served by all, that he who is great should be greatly feared and greatly praised.

(2.) His verity is as evident as the idol's vanity, v. 10. They are the work of men's hands, and therefore nothing is more plain than that it is a jest to worship them, if that may be called a jest which is so great an indignity to him that made us: But the Lord is the true God, the God of truth; he is God in truth. God Jehovah is truth; he is not a counterfeit and pretender, as they are, but is really what he has revealed himself to be; he is one we may depend upon, in whom and by whom we cannot be deceived. [1.] Look upon him as he is in himself, and he is the living God. He is life itself, has life in himself, and is the

fountain of life to all the creatures. The gods of the heathen are dead things, worthless and useless, but ours is a living God, and hath immortality. [2.] Look upon him with relation to his creatures, he is a King, and absolute monarch, over them all, is their owner and ruler, has an incontestable right both to command them and dispose of them. As a king, he protects the creatures, provides for their welfare, and preserves peace among them. He is an everlasting king. The counsels of his kingdom were from everlasting and the continuance of it will be to everlasting. He is a King of eternity. The idols whom they call their kings are but of yesterday, and will soon be abolished; and the kings of the earth, that set them up to be worshipped, will themselves be in the dust shortly; but the Lord shall reign for ever, thy God, O Zion! unto all generations.

(3.) None knows the power of his anger. Let us stand in awe, and not dare to provoke him by giving that glory to another which is due to him alone; for at his wrath the earth shall tremble, even the strongest and stoutest of the kings of the earth; nay, the earth, firmly as it is fixed, when he pleases is made to quake and the rocks to tremble, Ps. civ. 32; Hab. iii. 6, 10. Though the nations should join together to contend with him, and unite their force, yet they would be found utterly unable not only to resist, but even to abide his indignation. Not only can they not make head against it, for it would overcome them, but they cannot bear up under it, for it would overload them, Ps. lxxvi. 7, 8; Nah. i. 6.

(4.) He is the God of nature, the fountain of all being; and all the powers of nature are at his command and disposal, v. 12, 13. The God we worship is he that made the heavens and the earth, and has a sovereign dominion over both; so that his invisible things are manifested and proved in the things that are seen. [1.] If we look back, we find that the whole world owed its origin to him as its first cause. It was a common saying even among the Greeks—He that sets up to be another god ought first to make another world. While the heathen worship gods that they made, we worship the God that made us and all things. First, The earth is a body of vast bulk, has valuable treasures in its bowels and more valuable fruit on its surface. It and them he has made by his power; and it is by no less than an infinite power that it hangs upon nothing, as it does (Job xxvi. 7)—ponderibus librata suis—poised by its own weight. Secondly, The world, the habitable part of the earth, is admirably fitted for the use and service of man, and he hath established it so by his wisdom, so that it continues serviceable in constant changes and yet a continual stability from one generation to another. Therefore both the earth and the world are his, Ps. xxiv. 1. Thirdly, The heavens are won-



derfully stretched out to an incredible extent, and it is *by his discretion* that they are so, and that the motions of the heavenly bodies are directed for the benefit of this lower world. These declare his glory (Ps. xix. 1), and oblige us to declare it, and not give that glory to the heavens which is due to him that made them. [2.] If we look up, we see his providence to be a continued creation (v. 13): *When he uttereth his voice* (gives the word of command) *there is a multitude of waters in the heavens*, which are poured out on the earth, whether for judgment or mercy, as he intends them. When he utters his voice in the thunder, immediately there follow thunder-showers, in which there are a multitude of waters; and those come with a noise, as the margin reads it; and we read of the *noise of abundance of rain*, 1 Kings xviii. 41. Nay, there are wonders done daily in the kingdom of nature without noise: *He causes the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth*, from all parts of the earth, even the most remote, and chiefly those that lie next the sea. All the earth pays the tribute of vapours, because all the earth receives the blessing of rain. And thus the moisture in the universe, like the money in a kingdom and the blood in the body, is continually circulating for the good of the whole. Those vapours produce wonders, for of them are formed *lightnings for the rain*, and the winds which God from time to time brings forth out of his treasures, as there is occasion for them, directing them all in such measure and for such use as he thinks fit, as payments are made out of the treasury. All the meteors are so ready to serve God's purposes that he seems to have treasures of them, that cannot be exhausted and may at any time be drawn from, Ps. cxxxv. 7. God glories in the treasures he has of these, Job xxxviii. 22, 23. This God can do; but which of the idols of the heathen can do the like? Note, There is no sort of weather but what furnishes us with a proof and instance of the wisdom and power of the great Creator.

(5.) This God is Israel's God in covenant, and the felicity of every Israelite indeed. Therefore let the house of Israel cleave to him, and not forsake him to embrace idols; for, if they do, they certainly change for the worse, for (v. 16) *the portion of Jacob is not like them*; their rock is not as our rock (Deut. xxxii. 31), nor ours like their mole-hills. Note, [1.] Those that have the Lord for their God have a full and complete happiness in him. *The God of Jacob is the portion of Jacob*; he is his all, and in him he has enough and needs no more in this world nor the other. In him we have a worthy portion, Ps. xvi. 5. [2.] If we have entire satisfaction and complacency in God as our portion, he will have a gracious delight in us as his people, whom he owns as *the rod of his inheritance*, his possession and

treasure, with whom he dwells and by whom he is served and honoured. [3.] It is the unspeakable comfort of all the Lord's people that he who is their God is *the former of all things*, and therefore is able to do all that for them, and give all that to them, which they stand in need of. *Their help stands in his name who made heaven and earth*. And he is the *Lord of hosts*, of all the hosts in heaven and earth, has them all at his command, and will command them into the service of his people when there is occasion. This is the name by which they know him, which they first give him the glory of and then take to themselves the comfort of. [4.] Herein God's people are happy above all other people, happy indeed, *bona si sua norint*—did they but know their blessedness. The gods which the heathen pride, and please, and so portion themselves in, are vanity and a lie; but *the portion of Jacob is not like them*.

3. The prophet, having thus compared the gods of the heathen with the God of Israel (between whom there is no comparison), reads the doom, the certain doom, of all those pretenders, and directs the Jews, in God's name, to read it to the worshippers of idols, though they were their lords and masters (v. 11): *Thus shall you say unto them* (and the God you serve will bear you out in saying it), *The gods which have not made the heavens and the earth* (and therefore are no gods, but usurpers of the honour due to him only who did make heaven and earth) *shall perish*, perish of course, because they are vanity—perish by his righteous sentence, because they are rivals with him. As gods they shall perish *from off the earth* (even all those things on earth beneath which they make gods of) and *from under these heavens*, even all those things in the firmament of heaven, under the highest heavens, which are deified, according to the distribution in the second commandment. These words in the original are not in the Hebrew, like all the rest, but in the Chaldee dialect, that the Jews in captivity might have this ready to say to the Chaldeans in their own language when they tempted them to idolatry: "Do you press us to worship your gods? We will never do that; for," (1.) "They are counterfeit deities; they are no gods, for they have not made the heavens and the earth, and therefore are not entitled to our homage, nor are we indebted to them either for the products of the earth or the influences of heaven, as we are to the God of Israel." The primitive Christians would say, when they were urged to worship such a god, *Let him make a world and he shall be my god*. While we have him to worship who made heaven and earth, it is very absurd to worship any other. (2.) "They are condemned deities. They shall perish; the time shall come when they shall be no more respected as they are now,

but shall be buried in oblivion, and they and their worshippers shall sink together. The earth shall no longer bear them; the heavens shall no longer cover them; but both shall abandon them." It is repeated (v. 15), *In the time of their visitation they shall perish*. When God comes to reckon with idolaters he will make them weary of their idols, and glad to be rid of them. They shall cast them to the moles and to the bats, Isa. ii. 20. Whatever runs against God and religion will be run down at last.

17 Gather up thy wares out of the land, O inhabitant of the fortress. 18 For thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will sling out the inhabitants of the land at this once, and will distress them, that they may find *it so*. 19 Woe is me for my hurt! my wound is grievous: but I said, Truly this *is* a grief, and I must bear it. 20 My tabernacle is spoiled, and all my cords are broken: my children are gone forth of me, and they *are* not: *there is* none to stretch forth my tent any more, and to set up my curtains. 21 For the pastors are become brutish, and have not sought the LORD: therefore they shall not prosper, and all their flocks shall be scattered. 22 Behold, the noise of the bruit is come, and a great commotion out of the north country, to make the cities of Judah desolate, and a den of dragons. 23 O LORD, I know that the way of man *is* not in himself: *it is* not in man that walketh to direct his steps. 24 O LORD, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing. 25 Pour out thy fury upon the heathen that know thee not, and upon the families that call not on thy name: for they have eaten up Jacob, and devoured him, and consumed him, and have made his habitation desolate.

In these verses,

I. The prophet threatens, in God's name, the approaching ruin of Judah and Jerusalem, v. 17, 18. The Jews that continued in their own land, after some were carried into captivity, were very secure; they thought themselves *inhabitants of a fortress*; their country was their strong hold, and, in their own conceit, impregnable; but they are here told to think of leaving it: they must prepare to go after their brethren, and pack up their effects in expectation of it: "*Gather up thy wares out of the land; contract your*

affairs, and bring them into as small a compass as you can. *Arise, depart, this is not your rest*, Mic. ii. 10. Let not what you have lie scattered, for the Chaldeans will be upon you again, to be the executioners of the sentence God has passed upon you (v. 18): "*Behold, I will sling out the inhabitants of the land at this once*; they have hitherto dropped out, by a few at a time, but one captivity more shall make a thorough riddance, and they shall be slung out as a stone out of a sling, so easily, so thoroughly, shall they be cast out; nothing of them shall remain. They shall be thrown out with violence, and driven to a place at a great distance off, in a little time." See this comparison used to signify an utter destruction, 1 Sam. xxv. 29. *Yet once more* God will shake their land, and *shake the wicked out of it*, Heb. xii. 26. He adds, *And I will distress them, that they may find it so*. He will not only throw them out hence (that he may do and yet they may be easy elsewhere); but, whithersoever they go, trouble shall follow them; they shall be continually perplexed and straitened, and at a loss within themselves: and who or what can make those easy whom God will distress, whom he will distress *that they may find it so*, that they may feel that which they would not believe? They were often told of the weight of God's wrath and their utter inability to make head against it, or bear up under it. They were told that their sin would be their ruin, and they would not regard nor credit what was told them; but now *they shall find it so*; and therefore God will pursue them with his judgments. *that they may find it so*, and be forced to acknowledge it. Note, Sooner or later sinners will find it just as the word of God has represented things to them, and no better, and that the threatenings were not bugbears.

II. He brings in the people sadly lamenting their calamities (v. 19): *Woe is me for my hurt!* Some make this the prophet's own lamentation, not for himself, but for the calamities and desolations of his country. He mourned for those that would not be persuaded to mourn for themselves; and, since there were none that had so much sense as to join with them, he weeps in secret, and cries out, *Woe is me!* In mournful times it becomes us to be of a mournful spirit. But it may be taken as the language of the people, considered as a body, and therefore speaking as a single person. The prophet puts into their mouths the words they *should* say; whether they would say them or no, they should have cause to say them. Some among them would thus bemoan themselves, and all of them, at last, would be forced to do it. 1. They lament that the affliction is very great, and it is very hard to them to bear it, the more hard because they had not been used to trouble and now did not expect it: "*Woe is me for my hurt*, not for what I fear, but for what I



feel;" for they are not, as some are, worse frightened than hurt. Nor is it a slight hurt, but a wound, a wound that is *grievous*, very painful, and very threatening. 2. That there is no remedy but patience. They cannot help themselves, but must sit still, and abide it: *But I said*, when I was about to complain of my wound, To what purpose is it to complain? *This is a grief, and I must bear it* as well as I can. This is the language rather of a sullen than of a gracious submission, of a patience per force, not a patience by principle. When I am in affliction I should say, "This is an evil, and I will bear it, because it is the will of God that I should, because his wisdom has appointed this for me and his grace will make it work for good to me." This is *receiving evil* at the hand of God, Job ii. 10. But to say, "This is an evil, and I must bear it, because I cannot help it," is but a brutal patience, and argues a want of those good thoughts of God which we should always have, even under our afflictions, saying, not only, God can and will do what he pleases, but, *Let him do what he pleases*. 3. That the country was quite ruined and wasted (v. 20): *My tabernacle is spoiled*. Jerusalem, though a strong city, now proves as weak and moveable as a tabernacle: their government is dissolved, and their state has fallen to pieces, like a tabernacle or tent, when it is taken down, and *all its cords*, that should keep it together, are *broken*. Or by the tabernacle here may be meant the temple, the sanctuary, which at first was but a tabernacle, and is now called so, as then it was sometimes called a temple. Their church is ruined, and all the supports of it fail. It was a general destruction of church and state, city and country, and there were none to repair these desolations. "*My children have gone forth of me*; some have fled, others are slain, others carried into captivity, so that as to me *they are not*; I am likely to be an outcast, and to perish for want of shelter; for *there is none to stretch forth my tent any more*, none of my children that used to do it for me, *none to set up my curtains*, none to do me any service." *Jerusalem has none to guide her of all her sons*, Isa. li. 18. 4. That the rulers took no care, nor any proper measures, for the redress of their grievances and the re-establishing of their ruined state (v. 21): *The pastors have become brutish*. When the tents, the shepherds' tents, were spoiled (v. 20), it concerned the shepherds to look after them; but they were foolish shepherds. Their kings and princes had no regard at all for the public welfare, seemed to have no sense of the desolations of the land, but were quite besotted and infatuated. The priests, the pastors of God's tabernacle, did a great deal towards the ruin of religion, but nothing towards the repair of it. They are *brutish* indeed, for *they have not sought the Lord*; they have neither made their peace with him

nor their prayer to him; they had no eye to him and his providence, in their management of affairs; they neither acknowledged the judgment, nor expected the deliverance, to come from his hand. Note, Those are brutish people that do not seek the Lord, that live without prayer, and live without God in the world. Every man is either a saint or a brute. But it is sad indeed with a people when their pastors, that should *feed them with knowledge and understanding*, are themselves thus brutish. And what comes of it? *Therefore they shall not prosper*; none of their attempts for the public safety shall succeed. Note, Those cannot expect to prosper who do not by faith and prayer take God along with them in all their ways. And, when the pastors are brutish, what else can be expected but that *all their flocks should be scattered*? For, *if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the ditch*. The ruin of a people is often owing to the brutishness of their pastors. 5. That the report of the enemy's approach was very dreadful (v. 22): *The noise of the bruit has come*, of the report which at first was but whispered and bruited abroad, as wanting confirmation. It now proves too true: *A great commotion arises out of the north country*, which threatens to make *all the cities of Judah desolate and a den of dragons*; for they must all expect to be sacrificed to the avarice and fury of the Chaldean army. And what else can that place expect but to be made a den of dragons which has by sin made itself a den of thieves?

III. He turns to God, and addresses himself to him, finding it to little purpose to speak to the people. It is some comfort to poor ministers that, if men will not hear them, God will; and to him they have liberty of access at all times. Let them close their preaching with prayer, as the prophet, and then they shall have no reason to say that they have laboured in vain.

1. The prophet here acknowledges the sovereignty and dominion of the divine Providence, that by it, and not by their own will and wisdom, the affairs both of nations and particular persons are directed and determined, v. 23. This is an article of our faith which it is very proper for us to make confession of at the throne of grace when we are complaining of an affliction or suing for a mercy: "*O Lord, I know*, and believe, *that the way of man is not in himself*; Nebuchadnezzar did not come of himself against our land, but by the direction of a divine Providence." We cannot of ourselves do any thing for our own relief, unless God work with us and command deliverance for us; for *it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps*, though he seem in his walking to be perfectly at liberty and to choose his own way. Those that had promised themselves a long enjoyment of their estates and possessions were made to know, by sad experience, when they were thrown out by the

Chaldeans, that *the way of man is not in himself*; the designs which men lay deep, and think well-formed, are dashed to pieces in a moment. We must all apply this to ourselves, and mix faith with it, that we are not at our own disposal, but under a divine direction; the event is often overruled so as to be quite contrary to our intention and expectation. We are not masters of our own way, nor can we think that everything should be according to our mind; we must therefore refer ourselves to God and acquiesce in his will. Some think that the prophet here mentions this with a design to make this comfortable use of it, that, the way of the Chaldean army being not in themselves, they can do no more than God permits them; he can set bounds to these proud waves, and say, *Hitherto they shall come, and no further*. And a quieting consideration it is that the most formidable enemies have *no power against us but what is given them from above*.

2. He deprecates the divine wrath, that it might not fall upon God's Israel, v. 24. He speaks not for himself only, but on the behalf of his people: *O Lord, correct me, but with judgment* (in measure and with moderation, and in wisdom, no more than is necessary for the driving out of the foolishness that is bound up in our hearts), *not in thy anger* (how severe soever the correction be, let it come from thy love, and be designed for our good and made to work for good), not to *bring us to nothing*, but to bring us home to thyself. Let it not be according to the desert of our sins, but according to the designs of thy grace. Note, (1.) We cannot pray in faith that we may never be corrected, while we are conscious to ourselves that we need correction and deserve it, and know that as many as God loves he chastens. (2.) The great thing we should dread in affliction is the wrath of God. Say not, Lord, *do not correct me*, but, Lord, *do not correct me in anger*; for that will infuse wormwood and gall into the affliction and misery that will *bring us to nothing*. We may bear the smart of his rod, but we cannot bear the weight of his wrath.

3. He imprecates the divine wrath against the oppressors and persecutors of Israel (v. 25): *Pour out thy fury upon the heathen that know thee not*. This prayer does not come from a spirit of malice or revenge, nor is it intended to prescribe to God whom he should execute his judgments upon, or in what order; but, (1.) It is an appeal to his justice. As if he had said, "Lord, we are a provoking people; but are there not other nations that are more so? And shall we only be punished? We are thy children, and may expect a fatherly correction; but they are thy enemies, and against them we have reason to think thy indignation should be, not against us." This is God's usual method. *The cup put into the hands of God's people is full of mixtures, mixtures of mercy; but*

*the dregs of the cup are reserved for the wicked of the earth, let them wring them out*, Ps. lxxv. 8. (2.) It is a prediction of God's judgments upon all the impenitent enemies of his church and kingdom. If *judgment begin thus at the house of God*, what shall be *the end of those that obey not his gospel*? 1 Pet. iv. 17. See how the heathen are described, on whom God's fury shall be poured out. [1.] They are strangers to God, and are content to be so. *They know him not*, nor desire to know him. They are families that live without prayer, that have nothing of religion among them; they *call not on God's name*. Those that restrain prayer prove that they know not God; for those that know him will seek to him and entreat his favour. [2.] They are persecutors of the people of God and are resolved to be so. *They have eaten up Jacob* with as much greediness as those that are hungry eat their necessary food; nay, with more, for they never know when they have enough; *they have devoured him, and consumed him, and made his habitation desolate*, that is, the land in which he lives, or the temple of God, which is his habitation among them. Note, What the heathen, in their rage and malice, do against the people of God, though therein he makes use of them as the instruments of his correction, yet he will, for that, make them the objects of his indignation. This prayer is taken from Ps. lxxix. 6, 7.

#### CHAP. XI.

In this chapter, I. God by the prophet puts the people in mind of the covenant he had made with their fathers, and how much he had insisted upon it, as the condition of the covenant, that they should be obedient to him, ver. 1-7. II. He charges it upon them that they, in succession to their fathers, and in confederacy among themselves, had obstinately refused to obey him, ver. 8-10. III. He threatens to punish them with utter ruin for their disobedience, especially for their idolatry (ver. 11, 13), and tells them that their idols should not save them (ver. 12), that their prophets should not pray for them (ver. 14); he also justifies his proceedings herein, they having brought all this mischief upon themselves by their own folly and wilfulness, ver. 15-17. IV. Here is an account of a conspiracy formed against Jeremiah by his fellow-citizens, the men of Anathoth; God's discovery of it to him (ver. 18, 19), his prayer against them (ver. 20), and a prediction of God's judgments upon them for it, ver. 21-23.

**T**HE word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, 2 Hear ye the words of this covenant, and speak unto the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; 3 And say thou unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel; Cursed be the man that obeyeth not the words of this covenant, 4 Which I commanded your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, Obey my voice, and do them, according to all which I command you: so shall ye be my people, and I will be your God: 5 That I may perform the oath which I have sworn unto your fathers, to give them a land



flowing with milk and honey, as *it is* this day. Then answered I, and said, So be it, O LORD. 6 Then the LORD said unto me, Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, saying, Hear ye the words of this covenant, and do them. 7 For I earnestly protested unto your fathers in the day *that* I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, *even* unto this day, rising early and protesting, saying, Obey my voice. 8 Yet they obeyed not, nor inclined their ear, but walked every one in the imagination of their evil heart: therefore I will bring upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded *them* to do; but they did *them* not. 9 And the LORD said unto me, A conspiracy is found among the men of Judah, and among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 10 They are turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, which refused to hear my words; and they went after other gods to serve them: the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant which I made with their fathers.

The prophet here, as prosecutor in God's name, draws up an indictment against the Jews for wilful disobedience to the commands of their rightful Sovereign. For the more solemn management of this charge,

I. He produces the commission he had to draw up the charge against them. He did not take pleasure in accusing the children of his people, but God commanded him to *speaking it to the men of Judah*, v. 1, 2. In the original it is plural: *Speak you this*. For what he said to Jeremiah was the same that he gave in charge to all his servants the prophets. They none of them said any other than what Moses, in the law, had said; to that therefore they must refer themselves, and direct the people: "*Hear the words of this covenant*"; turn to your Bibles, be judged by them." Jeremiah must now proclaim this in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem, that all may hear, for all are concerned. All the words of reproof and conviction which the prophets spoke were grounded upon the *words of the covenant*, and agreed with that; and therefore "*hear these words*", and understand by them upon what terms you stood with God at first; and then, by comparing yourselves with the covenant, you will soon be aware upon what terms you now stand with him."

II. He opens the charter upon which their

state was founded and by which they held their privileges. They had forgotten the tenour of it, and lived as if they thought that the grant was absolute and that they might do what they pleased and yet have what God had promised, or as if they thought that the keeping up of the ceremonial observances was all that God required of them. He therefore shows them, with all possible plainness, that the thing God insisted upon was *obedience*, which was *better than sacrifice*. He said, *Obey my voice*, v. 4 and again v. 7. "Own God for your Master; give up yourselves to him as his subjects and servants; attend to all the declarations of his mind and will, and make conscience of complying with them. *Do my commandments*, not only in some things, but *according to all which I command you*; make conscience of moral duties especially, and rest not in those that are merely ritual; hear the words of the covenant, and do them." 1. This was the original contract between God and them, when he first formed them into a people. It was what he *commanded their fathers* when he first brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, v. 4 and again v. 7. He never intended to take them under his guidance and protection upon any other terms. This was what he required from them in gratitude for the great things he did for them when he brought them *from the iron furnace*. He redeemed them out of the service of the Egyptians, which was perfect slavery, that he might take them into his own service, which is perfect freedom, Luke i. 74, 75. 2. This was not only laid before them then, but it was with the greatest importunity imaginable pressed upon them, v. 7. God not only commanded it, but *earnestly protested it to their fathers*, when he brought them into covenant with himself. Moses inculcated it again and again, by precept upon precept and line upon line. 3. This was made the condition of the relation between them and God, which was so much their honour and privilege: "*So shall you be my people and I will be your God*"; I will own you for mine, and you may call upon me as yours;" this intimates that, if they refused to obey, they could no longer claim the benefit of the relation. 4. It was upon these terms that the land of Canaan was given them for a possession: *Obey my voice, that I may perform the oath sworn to your fathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey*, v. 5. God was ready to fulfil the promise, but then they must fulfil the condition; if not, the promise is void, and it is just with God to turn them out of possession. Being brought in upon their good behaviour, they had no wrong done them if they were turned out upon their ill behaviour. Obedience was the rent reserved by the lease, with a power to re-enter for non-payment. 5. This obedience was not only made a condition of the blessing, but was required under the penalty

of a curse. This is mentioned first here (v. 3), that they might, if possible, be awakened by the terrors of the Lord: *Cursed be the man*, though it were but a single person, *that obeys not the words of this covenant*, much more when it is the body of the nation that rebels. There are curses of the covenant as well as blessings: and Moses set before them not only *life and good*, but *death and evil* (Deut. xxx. 15), so that they had fair warning given them of the fatal consequences of disobedience. 6. Lest this covenant should be forgotten, and, because out of mind, should be thought out of date, God had from time to time called to them to remember it, and by his servants the prophets had made a continual claim of this rent, so that they could not plead, in excuse of their non-payment, that it had never been demanded; *from the day when he brought them out of Egypt to this day* (and that was nearly 1000 years) he had been, in one way or other, *at sundry times and in divers manners*, protesting to them the necessity of obedience. God keeps an account how long we have enjoyed the means of grace and how powerful those means have been, how often we have been not only spoken to, but protested to, concerning our duty. 7. This covenant was consented to (v. 5): *Then answered I, and said, So be it, O Lord!* These are the words of the prophet, expressing either, (1.) His own consent to the covenant for himself, and his desire to have the benefit of it. God promised Canaan to the obedient: "Lord," says he, "I take thee at thy word, I will be obedient; let me have my inheritance in the land of promise, of which Canaan is a type." Or, (2.) His good will, and good wish, that his people might have the benefit of it. "Amen; Lord, let them still be kept in possession of this good land, and not turned out of it; make good the promise to them." Or, (3.) His people's consent to the covenant: "*Then answered I, in the name of the people, So be it.*" Taking it in this sense, it refers to the declared consent which the people gave to the covenant, not only to the precepts of it when they said, *All that the Lord shall say unto us we will do and will be obedient*, but to the penalties when they said *Amen* to all the curses upon Mount Ebal. The more solemnly we have engaged ourselves to God the more reason we have to hope that the engagement will be perpetual; and yet here it did not prove so.

III. He charges them with breach of covenant, such a breach as amounted to a forfeiture of their charter, v. 8. God had said again and again, by his law and by his prophets, "*Obey my voice*, do as you are bidden, and all shall be well;" *yet they obeyed not*; and, because they were resolved not to submit their souls to God's commandments, they would not so much as incline their ears to them, but got as far as they could out of call: *They walked every one in the imagination*

*of their evil heart*, followed their own inventions; every man did as his fancy and humour led him, right or wrong, lawful or unlawful, both in their devotions and in their conversations; see ch. vii. 24. What then could they expect, but to fall under the curse of the covenant, since they would not comply with the commands and conditions of it? *Therefore I will bring upon them all the words of this covenant*, that is, all the threatenings contained in it, because *they did not what they were commanded*. Note, The words of the covenant shall not fall to the ground. If we do not by our obedience qualify ourselves for the blessings of it, we shall by our disobedience bring ourselves under the curses of it. That which aggravated their defection from God, and rebellion against him, was that it was general, and as it were *by consent*, v. 9, 10. Jeremiah himself saw that many lived in open disobedience to God, but the Lord told him that the matter was worse than he thought of: *A conspiracy is found among them*, by him whose eye is upon the hidden works of darkness. There is a combination against God and religion, a dangerous design formed to overthrow God's government and bring in the pretenders, the counterfeit deities. This intimates that they were wilful and deliberate in wickedness (they rebelled against God, not through incogitancy, but presumptuously, and with a high hand),—that they were subtle and ingenious in wickedness, and carried on their plot against religion with a great deal of art and contrivance,—that they were linked together in the design, and, as is usual among conspirators, engaged to stand by one another in it and to live and die together; they were resolved to go through with it. A cursed conspiracy! O that there were not the like in our day! Observe, 1. What the conspiracy was. They designed to overthrow divine revelation, and set that aside, and persuade people not to hear, not to heed, the words of God. They did all they could to derogate from the authority of the scriptures and to lessen the value of them; they designed to draw people *after other gods to serve them*, to consult them as their oracles and make court to them as their benefactors. Human reason shall be their god, a light within their god, an infallible judge their god, saints and angels their gods, the god of this or the other nation shall be theirs; thus, under several disguises, they are in the same confederacy *against the Lord and against his anointed*. 2. Who were in the conspiracy. One would have expected to find some foreigners ring-leaders in it; but no, (1.) *The inhabitants of Jerusalem* are in conspiracy with the men of Judah; city and country agree in this, however they may differ in other things. (2.) Those of this generation seem to be in conspiracy with those of the foregoing generation, to carry on the war from age to age



against religion : *They are turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers*, and have risen up in their stead, *a seed of evil-doers*, an increase of sinful men, Num. xxxii. 14. In Josiah's time there had been a reformation, but after his death the people returned to the idolatries which then they had renounced. (3.) Judah and Israel, the kingdom of the ten tribes and that of the two, that were often at daggers-drawing one with another, were yet in a conspiracy to break the covenant God had made with their fathers, even with the heads of all the twelve tribes. The house of Israel began the revolt, but the house of Judah soon came into the conspiracy. Now what else could be expected but that God should take severe methods, both for the chastising of these conspirators and the crushing of this conspiracy; for none ever hardened his heart thus against God and prospered? He that rolls this stone will find it return upon him.

11 Therefore thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon them, which they shall not be able to escape; and though they shall cry unto me, I will not hearken unto them. 12 Then shall the cities of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem go, and cry unto the gods unto whom they offer incense : but they shall not save them at all in the time of their trouble. 13 For according to the number of thy cities were thy gods, O Judah; and according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem have ye set up altars to that shameful thing, even altars to burn incense unto Baal. 14 Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up a cry or prayer for them: for I will not hear them in the time that they cry unto me for their trouble. 15 What hath my beloved to do in mine house, seeing she hath wrought lewdness with many, and the holy flesh is passed from thee? when thou doest evil, then thou rejoicest. 16 The LORD called thy name, A green olive-tree, fair, and of goodly fruit : with the noise of a great tumult he hath kindled fire upon it, and the branches of it are broken. 17 For the LORD of hosts, that planted thee, hath pronounced evil against thee, for the evil of the house of Israel and of the house of Judah, which they have done against themselves to provoke me to anger in offering incense unto Baal.

This paragraph, which contains so much of God's wrath, might very well be expected to follow upon that which goes next before, which contained so much of his people's sin. When God found so much evil among them we cannot think it strange if it follows, *Therefore I will bring evil upon them* (v. 11), the evil of punishment for the evil of sin; and there is no remedy, no relief: the decree has gone forth and the sentence will be executed.

I. They cannot help themselves, but will be found too weak to contest with God's judgments; it is *evil which they shall not be able to escape*, or to go forth out of, by any evasion whatsoever. Note, Those that will not submit to God's government shall not be able to escape his wrath. There is no fleeing from his justice, no avoiding his cognizance. Evil pursues sinners and entangles them in snares out of which they cannot extricate themselves.

II. Their God will not help them; his providence shall no way favour them: *Though they shall cry unto me, I will not hearken unto them*. In their affliction they will seek the God whom before they slighted, and cry to him whom before they would not vouchsafe to speak to. But how can they expect to speed? For he has plainly told us that he that turns away his ears from hearing the law, as they did, for they inclined not their ear (v. 8), even his prayer shall be an abomination to him, as the word of the Lord was now to them a reproach.

III. Their idols shall not help them, v. 12. They shall go, and cry to the gods to whom they now offer incense, and put them in mind of the costly services wherewith they had honoured them, expecting they should now have relief from them, but in vain. They shall be sent to the gods whom they served (Judg. x. 14; Deut. xxxii. 37, 38), and what the better? They shall not save them at all, shall do nothing towards their salvation, nor give them any prospect of it; they shall not afford them the least comfort, nor relief, nor mitigation of their trouble. It is God only that is a friend at need, a present powerful help in time of trouble. The idols cannot help themselves; how then should they help their worshippers? Those that make idols of the world and the flesh will in vain have recourse to them in a day of distress. If the idols could have done any real kindness to their worshippers, they would have done it for this people, who had renounced the true God to embrace them, had multiplied them according to the number of their cities (v. 13), nay, in Jerusalem, according to the number of their streets. Suspecting both their sufficiency and their readiness to help them, they must have many, lest a few would not serve; they must have them dispersed in every corner, lest they should be out of the way when they had occasion for them. In Je-

Jerusalem, the city which God had chosen to put his name there, publicly in the streets of Jerusalem, in every street, they had altars to that shameful thing, that shame, even to Baal, which they ought to have been ashamed of, with which they did reproach the Lord and bring confusion upon themselves. But now in their distress their many gods, and many altars, should stand them in no stead. Note, Those that will not be ashamed of their commission of sin as a wicked thing will be ashamed of their expectations from sin as a fruitless thing.

IV. Jeremiah's prayers shall not help them, v. 14. What God had said to him before (ch. vii. 16) he here says again, *Pray not thou for this people*. This is not designed for a command to the prophet, so much as for a threatening to the people, that they should have no benefit by the prayers of their friends for them. God would give no encouragement to the prophets to pray for them, would not stir up the spirit of prayer, but cast a damp upon it, would put it into their hearts to pray, not for the body of the people, but for the remnant among them, to pray for their eternal salvation, not for their deliverance from the temporal judgments that were coming upon them; and what other prayers were put up for them should not be heard. Those are in a sad case indeed that are cut off from the benefit of prayer. "*I will not hear them when they cry*, and therefore do not thou pray for them." Note, Those that have so far thrown themselves out of God's favour that he will not hear their prayers cannot expect benefit by the prayers of others for them.

V. The profession they make of religion shall stand them in no stead, v. 15. They were originally God's beloved, his spouse, he was married to them by the covenant of peculiarity; even the unbelieving Jews are said to be *beloved for the fathers' sake*, Rom. xi. 28. As such they had a place in God's house; they were admitted to worship in the courts of his temple; they partook of God's altar; they ate of the flesh of their peace-offerings, here called the *holy flesh*, which God had the honour of and they had the comfort of. This they gloried in, and trusted to. What harm could come to those who were God's beloved, who were under the protection of his house? Even when they *did evil yet they rejoiced and gloried in this*, made a mighty noise of this. And *when their evil was* (so the margin reads it), when trouble came upon them, they *rejoiced in this*, and made this their confidence; but their confidence would deceive them, for God has rejected it, they themselves having forfeited the privileges they so much boasted of. They have wrought lewdness with many, have been guilty of spiritual whoredom, have worshipped many idols; and therefore, 1. God's temple will *yield them no protection*; it is fit that the adulteress, especially when

she has so often repeated her whoredoms and has grown so impudent in them and irreclaimable, should be *put away*, and turned out of doors: "*What has my beloved to do in my house?*" She is a scandal to it, and therefore it shall no longer be a shelter to her." 2. God's altar will yield them no satisfaction, nor can they expect any comfort from that: "*The holy flesh has passed from thee*, that is, an end will soon be put to thy sacrifices, when the temple shall be laid in ruins; and where then will the holy flesh be, that thou art so proud of?" A holy heart will be a comfort to us when the holy flesh has passed from us; an inward principle of grace will make up the want of the outward means of grace. But woe unto us if the departure of the holy flesh be accompanied with the departure of the Holy Spirit.

VI. God's former favours to them shall stand them in no stead, v. 16, 17. Their remembrance of them shall be no comfort to them under their troubles, and God's remembrance of them shall be no argument for their relief. 1. It is true God had done great things for them; that people had been favourites above any people under the sun; they had been the darlings of heaven. God had called Israel's name a *green olive-tree*, and had made them so, for he miscalls nothing; he had *planted them* (v. 17), had formed them into a people, with all the advantages they could have to make them a fruitful and flourishing people, so good was their law and so good was their land. One would think no other than that a people so planted, so watered, so cultivated, should be, as the olive-tree is, ever green, in respect both of piety and prosperity, Ps. lii. 8. God called them *fair and of goodly fruit*, both good for food and pleasant to the eye, both amiable and serviceable to God and man, for with the greenness and fatness of the olive both are honoured, Judg. ix. 9. 2. It is as true that they have done evil things against God. He had planted them a green olive, a good olive, but they had degenerated into a *wild olive*, Rom. xi. 17. Both the *house of Israel* and the *house of Judah* had *done evil*, had *provoked God to anger in burning incense unto Baal*, setting up other mediators between them and the supreme God besides the promised Messiah; nay, setting up other gods in competition with the true and living God, for they had *gods many*, as well as *lords many*. 3. When they have conducted themselves so ill they can expect no other than that, notwithstanding what good he has done to them and designed for them, he should now bring upon them the evil he has pronounced against them. He that made them will not save them. He that planted this green olive-tree, and expected fruit from it, finding it barren and grown wild, *has kindled fire upon it*, to burn it as it stands; for, being without fruit, it is *twice dead*,



*plucked up by the roots* (Jude 12., it is *cut down and cast into the fire*, the fittest place for trees that cumber the ground, Matt. iii. 10. The *branches of it*, the *high and lofty boughs* (so the word signifies), are *broken*, are *broken down*, both princes and priests cut off. And thus it proves that the evil done against God, to *provoke him to anger*, is really done *against themselves*; they *wrong their own souls*; God is out of their reach, but they ruin themselves. See *ch. vii. 19*. Note, Every sin against God is a sin against ourselves, and so it will be found sooner or later.

18 And the LORD hath given me knowledge of it, and I know it: then thou showedst me their doings. 19 But I *was* like a lamb or an ox that is brought to the slaughter; and I knew not that they had devised devices against me, *saying*, Let us destroy the tree with the fruit thereof, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may be no more remembered. 20 But, O LORD of hosts, that judgest righteously, that triest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I revealed my cause. 21 Therefore thus saith the LORD of the men of Anathoth, that seek thy life, *saying*, Prophecy not in the name of the LORD, that thou die not by our hand: 22 Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, Behold, I will punish them: the young men shall die by the sword; their sons and their daughters shall die by famine: 23 And there shall be no remnant of them: for I will bring evil upon the men of Anathoth, *even* the year of their visitation.

The prophet Jeremiah has much in his writings concerning himself, much more than Isaiah had, the times he lived in being very troublesome. Here we have (as it should seem) the beginning of his sorrows, which arose from the people of his own city, Anathoth, a priest's city, and yet a malignant one. Observe here,

I. Their plot against him, *v. 19*. They *devised devices against him*, laid their heads together to contrive how they might be in the most plausible and effectual manner the death of him. Malice is ingenious in its devices, as well as industrious in its prosecutions. They said concerning Jeremiah, *Let us destroy the tree with the fruit thereof*—a proverbial expression, meaning, "Let us utterly destroy him root and branch. Let us

destroy both the father and the family" (as, when Naboth was put to death for treason, his sons were put to death with him), or rather "both the prophet and the prophecy; let us kill the one and defeat the other. *Let us cut him off from the land of the living*, as a false prophet, and load him with ignominy and disgrace, that his name may be no more remembered with respect. Let us sink his reputation, and so spoil the credit of his predictions." This was their plot; and, 1. It was a cruel one; but so cruel have the persecutors of God's prophets been. They *hunt for no less than the precious life*, and very precious the lives are that they hunt for. But, (2.) It was a baffled one. They thought to put an end to his days, but he survived most of his enemies; they thought to blast his memory, but it lives to this day, and will be blessed while time lasts.

II. The information which God gave him of this conspiracy against him. He knew nothing of it himself, so artfully had they concealed it; he came to Anathoth, meaning no harm to them and therefore fearing no harm from them, *like a lamb or an ox*, that thinks he is driven as usual to the field, *when he is brought to the slaughter*; so little did poor Jeremiah dream of the design his citizens that hated him had upon him. None of his friends could, and none of his enemies would, give him any notice of his danger, that he might shift for his own safety, as Paul's sister's son gave him intelligence of the Jews that were lying in wait for him. There is but a step between Jeremiah and death; but then the Lord gave him knowledge of it, by dream or vision, or impression upon his spirit, that he might save himself, as the king of Israel did upon the notice Elisha gave him, 2 Kings vi. 10. Thus he came to know it. God showed him their doings; and such were their devices that the discovering of them was the defeating of them. If God had not let him know his own danger, it would have been improved by unreasonable men against the reputation of his predictions, that he who foretold the ruin of his country could not foresee his own peril and avoid it. See what care God takes of his prophets: He *suffers no man to do them wrong*; all the rage of their enemies cannot prevail to take them off till they have finished their testimony. God knows all the secret designs of his and his people's enemies, and can, when he pleases, make them know. *A bird of the air shall carry the voice*.

III. His appeal to God hereupon, *v. 20*. His eye is to God as the Lord of hosts, that *judges righteously*. It is matter of comfort to us, when men deal unjustly with us, that we have a God to go to who does and will plead the cause of injured innocence and appear against the injurious. God's justice, which is a terror to the wicked, is a comfort to the godly. His eye is towards him as the God that *tries the reins and the heart*, that

perfectly sees what is in man, what are his thoughts and intents. He knew the integrity that was in Jeremiah's heart, and that he was not the man they represented him to be. He knew the wickedness that was in their hearts, though ever so cunningly concealed and disguised. Now, 1. Jeremiah prays judgment against them: "*Let me see thy vengeance on them*, that is, do justice between me and them in such a way as thou pleasest." Some think there was something of human frailty in this prayer; at least Christ has taught us another lesson, both by precept and by pattern, which is to pray for our persecutors. Others think it comes from a pure zeal for the glory of God and a pious and prophetic indignation against men that were by profession priests, the Lord's ministers, and yet were so desperately wicked as to fly out against one that did them no harm, merely for the service he did to God. This petition was a prediction that he should see God's vengeance on them. 2. He refers his cause entirely to the judgment of God: "*Unto thee have I revealed my cause*; to thee I have committed it, not desiring nor expecting to interest any other in it." Note, It is our comfort, when we are wronged, that we have a God to commit our cause to, and our duty to commit it to him, with a resolution to acquiesce in his definitive sentence, to subscribe, and not prescribe, to him.

IV. Judgment given against his persecutors, *the men of Anathoth*. It was to no purpose for him to appeal to the courts at Jerusalem, he could not have justice done him there: the priests there would stand by the priests at Anathoth, and rather second them than discountenance them; but God will *therefore* take cognizance of the cause himself, and we are sure that *his judgment is according to truth*. Here is, 1. Their crime excited, on which the sentence is grounded, v. 21. They sought the prophet's life, for they forbade him to prophesy upon pain of death; they were resolved either to silence him or to slay him. The provocation he gave them was his prophesying in the name of the Lord without license from those that were the governors of the city which he was a member of, and not prophesying such smooth things as they always bespoke. Their forbidding him to prophesy was in effect seeking his life, for it was seeking to defeat the end and business of his life and to rob him of the comfort of it. It is as bad to God's faithful ministers to have their mouth stopped as to have their breath stopped. But especially when it was resolved that if he did prophesy, as certainly he would notwithstanding their inhibition, he should *die by their hand*; they would be accusers, judges, executioners, and all. It used to be said that a prophet could not perish but at Jerusalem, for there the great council sat; but so bitter were the men of Anathoth against Jeremiah that they would undertake to

be the death of him himself. A prophet then shall find not only no honour, but no favour, in his own country. 2. The sentence passed upon them for this crime, v. 22, 23. God says, *I will punish them*; let me alone to deal with them. *I will visit this upon them*; so the word is. God will enquire into it and reckon for it. Two of God's four sore judgments shall serve to ruin their town:—*The sword shall devour their young men*, though they were young priests, not men of war (their character shall not be their protection), and *famine* shall destroy the children, *sons and daughters*, that tarry at home, which is a more grievous death than that by the sword, Lam. iv. 9. The destruction shall be final (v. 23): *There shall be no remnant of them left*, none to be the seed of another generation. They sought Jeremiah's life, and therefore they shall die; they would destroy him *root and branch*, that *his name* might be *no more remembered*, and therefore *there shall be no remnant of them*; and herein the Lord is righteous. Thus *evil is brought upon them, even the year of their visitation*, and that is evil enough, a recompence according to their deserts. Then shall Jeremiah see *his desire upon his enemies*. Note, Their condition is sad who have the prayers of good ministers and good people against them.

## CHAP. XII.

In this chapter we have, I. The prophet's humble complaint to God of the success that wicked people had in their wicked practices (ver. 1, 2) and his appeal to God concerning his own integrity (ver. 3), with a prayer that God would, for the sake of the public, bring the wickedness of the wicked to an end, ver. 3, 4. II. God's rebuke to the prophet for his uneasiness at his present troubles, bidding him prepare for greater, ver. 5, 6. III. A sad lamentation of the present deplorable state of the Israel of God, ver. 7—13. IV. An intimation of mercy to God's people, in a denunciation of wrath against their neighbours that helped forward their affliction, that they should be plucked out; but with a promise that if they would at last join themselves with the people of God they should come in sharers with them in their privileges, ver. 14—17.

**R**IGHTEOUS art thou, O LORD, when I plead with thee: yet let me talk with thee of *thy* judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? *wherefore* are all they happy that deal very treacherously? 2 Thou hast planted them, yea, they have taken root: they grow, yea, they bring forth fruit: thou *art* near in their mouth, and far from their reins. 3 But thou, O LORD, knowest me: thou hast seen me, and tried mine heart toward thee: pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and prepare them for the day of slaughter. 4 How long shall the land mourn, and the herbs of every field wither, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein? the beasts are consumed, and the birds; because they said, He



shall not see our last end. 5 If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and *if* in the land of peace, *wherein* thou trustedst, *they wearied thee*, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan? 6 For even thy brethren, and the house of thy father, even they have dealt treacherously with thee; yea, they have called a multitude after thee: believe them not, though they speak fair words unto thee.

The prophet doubts not but it would be of use to others to know what had passed between God and his soul, what temptations he had been assaulted with and how he had got over them; and therefore he here tells us,

I. What liberty he humbly took, and was graciously allowed him, to reason with God concerning his judgments, v. 1. He is about to *plead* with God, not to quarrel with him, or find fault with his proceedings, but to enquire into the meaning of them, that he might more and more see reason to be satisfied in them, and might have wherewith to answer both his own and others' objections against them. The works of the Lord, and the reasons of them, are *sought out even of those that have pleasure therein*, Ps. cxi. 2. We may not *strive with our Maker*, but we may reason with him. The prophet lays down a truth of unquestionable certainty, which he resolves to abide by in managing this argument: *Righteous art thou, O Lord: when I plead with thee*. Thus he arms himself against the temptation wherewith he was assaulted, to envy the prosperity of the wicked, before he entered into a parley with it. Note, When we are most in the dark concerning the meaning of God's dispensations we must still resolve to keep up right thoughts of God, and must be confident of this, that he never did, nor ever will do, the least wrong to any of his creatures; even when his judgments are unsearchable as a great deep, and altogether unaccountable, yet his righteousness is as conspicuous and immovable as the great mountains, Ps. xxxvi. 6. Though sometimes clouds and darkness are round about him, yet justice and judgment are always the habitation of his throne, Ps. xcvi. 2. When we find it hard to understand particular providences we must have recourse to general truths as our first principles, and abide by them; however dark the providence may be, *the Lord is righteous*; see Ps. lxxiii. 1. And we must acknowledge it to him, as the prophet here, even when we *plead with him*, as those that have no thoughts of contending, but of learning, being fully assured that he will be justified when he speaks. Note How-

ever we may see cause for our own information to plead with God, yet it becomes us to own that, whatever he says or does, he is in the right.

II. What it was in the dispensations of divine Providence that he stumbled at and that he thought would bear a debate. It was that which has been a temptation to many wise and good men, and such a one as they have with difficulty got over. They see the designs and projects of wicked people successful: *The way of the wicked prospers*; they compass their malicious designs and gain their point. They see their affairs and concerns in a good posture: *They are happy*, happy as the world can make them, though *they deal treacherously, very treacherously*, both with God and man. Hypocrites are chiefly meant (as appears, v. 2), who dissemble in their good professions, and depart from their good beginnings and good promises, and in both they deal treacherously, very treacherously. It has been said that men cannot expect to prosper who are unjust and dishonest in their dealings; but these deal treacherously, and yet *they are happy*. The prophet shows (v. 2) both their prosperity and their abuse of their prosperity. 1. God had been very indulgent to them and they were got beforehand in the world: "They are planted in a good land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and *thou hast planted them!* nay, thou didst cast out the heathen to plant them," Ps. xlv. 2; lxxx. 8. Many a tree is planted that yet never grows nor comes to any thing; but *they have taken root*; their prosperity seems to be confirmed and settled. They take root in the earth, for there they fix themselves, and thence they draw the sap of all their satisfaction. Many trees however take root which yet never come on; but these *grow, yea, they bring forth fruit*; their families are built up, they live high, and spend at a great rate; and all this was owing to the benignity of the divine Providence, which smiled upon them, Ps. lxxiii. 7. 2. Thus God had favoured them, though they had dealt treacherously with him: *Thou art near in their mouth and far from their reins*. This was no uncharitable censure, for he spoke by the Spirit of prophecy, without which it is not safe to charge men with hypocrisy whose appearances are plausible. Observe, (1.) Though they cared not for thinking of God, nor had any sincere affection to him, yet they could easily persuade themselves to speak of him frequently and with an air of seriousness. Piety from the teeth outward is no difficult thing. Many speak the language of Israel that are not Israelites indeed. (2.) Though they had on all occasions the name of God ready in their mouth, and accustomed themselves to those forms of speech that savoured of piety, yet they could not persuade themselves to keep up the fear of God in their hearts. The form

of godliness should engage us to keep up the power of it; but with them it did not do so.

III. What comfort he had in appealing to God concerning his own integrity (v. 3): *But thou, O Lord! knowest me.* Probably the wicked men he complains of were forward to reproach and censure him (ch. xviii. 18), in reference to which this was his comfort, that God was a witness of his integrity. God knew he was not such a one as they were (who had God *near in their mouths, but far from their reins*), nor such a one as they took him to be, and represented him, a deceiver and a false prophet; those that thus abused him did not know him, 1 Cor. ii. 8. "*But thou, O Lord! knowest me, though they think me not worth their notice.*" 1. Observe what the matter is concerning which he appeals to God: Thou knowest *my heart towards thee.* Note, We are as our hearts are, and our hearts are good or bad according as they are, or are not, towards God; and this is that therefore concerning which we should examine ourselves, that we may approve ourselves to God. 2. The cognizance to which he appeals: "*Thou knowest me better than I know myself, not by hearsay or report, for thou hast seen me, not with a transient glance, but thou hast tried my heart.*" God's knowledge of us is as clear and exact and certain as if he had made the most strict scrutiny. Note, The God with whom we have to do perfectly knows how our hearts are towards him. He knows both the guile of the hypocrite and the sincerity of the upright.

IV. He prays that God would turn his hand against these wicked people, and not suffer them to prosper always, though they had prospered long: "Let some judgment come to *pull them out of this fat pasture as sheep for the slaughter,*" Hos. iv. 16. God suffered them to prosper that by their pride and luxury they might fill up the measure of their iniquity and so be ripened for destruction; and therefore he thinks it a piece of necessary justice that they should fall into mischief themselves, because they had done so much mischief to others, that they should be pulled out of their land, because they had brought ruin upon the land, and the longer they continued in it the more hurt they did, as the plagues of their generation (v. 4): "*How long shall the land mourn* (as it does under the judgments of God inflicted upon it) *for the wickedness of those that dwell therein?* Lord, shall those prosper themselves that ruin all about them?" 1. See here what the judgment was which the land was now groaning under: *The herbs of every field wither* (the grass is burnt up and all the products of the earth fail), and then it follows of course, the beasts are consumed, and

the birds, 1 Kings xviii. 5. This was the effect of a long drought, or want of rain, which happened, as it should seem, at the latter end of Josiah's reign and the beginning of Jehoiakim's; it is mentioned ch. iii. 3, viii. 13, ix. 10, 12, and more fully afterwards, ch. xiv. If they would have been brought to repentance by this less judgment, the greater would have been prevented. Now why was it that this *fruitful land was turned into barrenness*, but for the *wickedness of those that dwell therein?* Ps. cvii. 34. Therefore the prophet prays that these wicked people might *die for their own sin*, and that the whole nation might not suffer for it. 2. See here what was the language of their wickedness: *They said, He shall not see our last end*, either, (1.) God himself shall not. Atheism is the root of hypocrisy. God is *far from their reins*, though *near in their mouth*, because they say, *How doth God know?* Ps. lxxiii. 11; Job xxii. 13. He knows not what way we take nor what it will end in. Or, (2.) Jeremiah shall not see our last end; whatever he pretends, when he asks us what shall be in the end hereof he cannot himself foresee it. They look upon him as a false prophet. Or, "whatever it is, he shall not live to see it, for we will be the death of him," ch. xi. 21. Note, [1.] Men's setting their latter end at a great distance, or looking upon it as uncertain, is at the bottom of all their wickedness, Lam. i. 9. [2.] The whole creation groans under the burden of the sin of man, Rom. viii. 22. It is for this that *the earth mourns* (so it may be read); *cursed is the ground for thy sake.*

V. He acquaints us with the answer God gave to those complaints of his, v. 5, 6. We often find the prophets admonished, whose business it was to admonish others, as Isa. viii. 11. Ministers have lessons to learn as well as lessons to teach, and must themselves hear God's voice and preach to themselves. Jeremiah complained much of the wickedness of the men of Anathoth, and that, notwithstanding that, they prospered. Now this seems to be an answer to that complaint. 1. It is allowed that he had cause to complain (v. 6): "*Thy brethren, the priests of Anathoth, who are of the house of thy father, who ought to have protected thee and pretended to do so, even they have dealt treacherously with thee*, have been false to thee, and, under colour of friendship, have designedly done thee all the mischief they could; they have called a multitude after thee, raised the mob upon thee, and incensed the common people against thee, to whom they have endeavoured, by all arts possible, to render thee despicable or odious, while at the same time they pretended that they had no design to persecute thee nor to deprive thee of thy liberty. They are indeed such as thou canst not believe, though they speak fair words to thee. They seem to be thy



friends, but are really thy enemies." Note, God's faithful servants must not think it at all strange if their foes be *those of their own house* (Matt. x. 36), and if those they expect kindness from prove such as they can put no confidence in, Mic. vii. 5. 2. Yet he is told that he carried the matter too far. (1.) He laid the unkindness of his countrymen too much to heart. *They wearied him*, because it was in a land of peace wherein he trusted, v. 5. It was very grievous to him to be thus hated and abused by his own kindred. He was disturbed in his mind by it; his spirit was sunk and overwhelmed with it, so that he was in great agitation and distress about it. Nay, he was discouraged in his work by it, began to be weary of prophesying, and to think of giving it up. (2.) He did not consider that this was but the beginning of his sorrow, and that he had sorer trials yet before him; and, whereas he should endeavour by a patient bearing of this trouble to prepare himself for greater, by his uneasiness under this he did but unfit himself for what further lay before him: *If thou hast run with the footmen and they have wearied thee*, and run thee quite out of breath, *then how wilt thou contend with horses?* If the injuries done him by the men of Anathoth made such an impression upon him, what would he do when the princes and chief priests at Jerusalem should set upon him with their power, as they did afterwards? *ch. xx. 2; xxxii. 2.* If he was so soon tired in a land of peace, where there was little noise or peril, *what would he do in the swellings of Jordan*, when that overflows all its banks and frightens even lions out of their thickets? *ch. xlix. 19.* Note, [1.] While we are in this world we must expect troubles and difficulties. Our life is a race, a warfare; we are in danger of being run down. [2.] God's usual method being to begin with smaller trials, it is our wisdom to expect greater than any we have yet met with. We may be called out to *contend with horsemen*, and the sons of Anak may perhaps be reserved for the last encounter. [3.] It highly concerns us to prepare for such trials and to consider what we should do in them. How shall we preserve our integrity and peace when we come to *the swellings of Jordan?* [4.] In order to our preparation for further and greater trials, we are concerned to approve ourselves well in present smaller trials, to keep up our spirits, keep hold of the promise, keep in our way, with our eye upon the prize, so run that we may obtain it. Some good interpreters understand this as spoken to the people, who were very secure and fearless of the threatened judgments. If they have been so humbled and impoverished by smaller calamities, so wasted by the Assyrians,—if the Ammonites and Moabites, who were their brethren, and with whom they were in league, proved false to them (as undoubtedly they would),—then

how would they be able to deal with such a powerful adversary as the Chaldeans would be? How would they bear up their head against that invasion which should come like *the swelling of Jordan?*

7 I have forsaken mine house, I have left mine heritage; I have given the dearly beloved of my soul into the hand of her enemies. 8 Mine heritage is unto me as a lion in the forest; it crieth out against me: therefore have I hated it. 9 Mine heritage is unto me as a speckled bird, the birds round about are against her; come ye, assemble all the beasts of the field, come to devour. 10 Many pastors have destroyed my vineyard, they have trodden my portion under foot, they have made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness. 11 They have made it desolate, and being desolate it mourneth unto me; the whole land is made desolate, because no man layeth it to heart. 12 The spoilers are come upon all high places through the wilderness: for the sword of the LORD shall devour from the *one* end of the land even to the *other* end of the land: no flesh shall have peace. 13 They have sown wheat, but shall reap thorns: they have put themselves to pain, but shall not profit: and they shall be ashamed of your revenues because of the fierce anger of the LORD.

The people of the Jews are here marked for ruin.

I. God is here brought in falling out with them and leaving them desolate; and they could never have been undone if they had not provoked God to desert them. It is a terrible word that God here says (v. 7): *I have forsaken my house*—the temple, which had been his palace; they had polluted it, and so forced him out of it: *I have left my heritage*, and will look after it no more. His people that he has taken such delight in, and care of, are now thrown out of his protection. They had been *the dearly beloved of his soul*, precious in his sight and honourable above any people, which is mentioned to aggravate their sin in returning him hatred for his love and their misery in throwing themselves out of the favour of one that had such a kindness for them, and to justify God in his dealings with them. He sought not occasion against them, but, if they would have conducted themselves with any tolerable propriety, he would have made

the best of them, for they were *the beloved of his soul*; but they had conducted themselves so that they had provoked him to give them into the hand of their enemies, to leave them unguarded, an easy prey to those that bore them ill-will. But what was the quarrel God had with a people that had been so long dear to him? Why, truly, they had degenerated. 1. They had become like *beasts of prey*, which nobody loves, but every body avoids and gets as far off from as he can (v. 8): *My heritage is unto me as a lion in the forest*. Their sins cry to heaven for vengeance as loud as a lion roars. Nay, they cry out against God in the threatenings and slaughter which they breathe against his prophets that speak to them in his name; and what is said and done against them God takes as said and done against himself. They blaspheme his name, oppose his authority, and bid defiance to his justice, and so cry out against him as a lion in the forest. Those that were the *sheep of God's pasture* had become barbarous and ravenous, and as ungovernable as lions in the forest; therefore he hated them; for what delight could the God of love take in a people that had now become as roaring lions and raging beasts, fit to be taken and shot at, as a vexation and torment to all about them? 2. They had become like *birds of prey*, and therefore also unworthy a place in God's house, where neither beasts nor birds of prey were admitted to be offered in sacrifice (v. 9): *My heritage is unto me as a bird with talons* (so some read it, and so the margin); they are continually pulling and pecking at one another; they have by their unnatural contentions made their country a cock-pit. Or as a *speckled bird*, dyed, or sprinkled, or bedewed with the blood of her prey. The shedding of innocent blood was Jerusalem's measure-filling sin, and hastened their ruin, not only as it provoked God against them, but as it provoked their neighbours likewise; for those that have *their hand against every man* shall have *every man's hand against them* (Gen. xvi. 12), and so it follows here: *The birds round about are against her*. Some make her a *speckled, pied, or motley bird*, upon the account of their mixing the superstitious customs and usages of the heathen with divine institutions in the worship of God; they were fond of a party-coloured religion, and thought it made them fine, when really it made them odious. God's turtle-dove is no speckled bird.

II. The enemies are here brought in falling upon them and laying them desolate. And some think it is upon this account that they are compared to a speckled bird, because fowls usually make a noise about a bird of an odd unusual colour. God's people are, among the children of this world, as *men wondered at, as a speckled bird*; but this people had by their own folly made themselves so; and the beasts and birds are called

and commissioned to prey upon them. Let *all the birds round be against her*, for God has forsaken her, and with them let *all the beasts of the field come to devour*. Those that have made a prey of others shall themselves be preyed upon. It did not lessen the sin of the nations, but very much increased the misery of Judah and Jerusalem, that the desolation brought upon them was by order from heaven. The birds and beasts are perhaps called to feast upon the bodies of the slain, as in St. John's vision, Rev. xix. 17, 18. The utter desolation of the land by the Chaldean army is here spoken of as a thing done, so sure, so near, was it. God speaks of it as a thing which he had appointed to be done, and yet which he had no pleasure in, any more than in the death of other sinners.

1. See with what a tender affection he speaks of this land, notwithstanding the sinfulness of it, in remembrance of his covenant, and the tribute of honour and glory he had formerly had from it: It is *my vineyard, my portion, my pleasant portion*, v. 10. Note, God has a kindness and concern for his church, though there be much amiss in it; and his correcting it will every way consist with his complacency in it.

2. See with what a tender compassion he speaks of the desolations of this land: *Many pastors* (the Chaldean generals that made themselves masters of the country and ate it up with their armies as easily as the Arabian shepherds with their flocks eat up the fruits of a piece of ground that lies common) *have destroyed my vineyard*, without any consideration had either of the value of it or of my interest in it; they have with the greatest insolence and indignation trodden it under foot, and that which was a pleasant land they have made a *desolate wilderness*. The destruction was universal: *The whole land is made desolate*, v. 11. It is made so by the sword of war: *The spoilers, the Chaldean soldiers, have come through the plain upon all high places*; they have made themselves masters of all the natural fastnesses and artificial fortresses, v. 12. *The sword devours from one end of the land to the other*; all places lie exposed, and the numerous army of the invaders disperse themselves into every corner of that fruitful country, so that *no flesh shall have peace*, none shall be exempt from the calamity nor be able to enjoy any tranquillity. When all flesh have corrupted their way, no flesh shall have peace; those only have peace that walk after the Spirit.

3. See whence all this misery comes. (1.) It comes from the displeasure of God. It is *the sword of the Lord that devours*, v. 12. While God's people keep close to him the sword of their protectors and deliverers is the sword of the Lord, witness that of Gideon; but when they have forsaken him, so that he has become their enemy and fights against them, then the sword of their un-



vaders and destroyers becomes the sword of the Lord; witness this of the Chaldeans. It is because of the fierce anger of the Lord (v. 13); it was this that kindled this fire among them and made their enemies so furious. And *who may stand before him when he is angry?* (2.) It is their sin that has made God their enemy, particularly their incorrigibility under former rebukes (v. 11): The land *mourns unto me*; the country that lies desolate does, as it were, pour out its complaint before God and humble itself under his hand; but the inhabitants are so senseless and stupid that *none of them lays it to heart*; they do not mourn to God, but are unaffected with his displeasure, while the very ground they go upon shames them. Note, When God's hand is lifted up, and men will not see, it shall be laid on, and they shall be made to feel, Isa. xxvi. 11.

4. See how unable they should be to guard against it (v. 13): "*They have sown wheat*, that is, they have taken a great deal of pains for their own security and promised themselves great matters from their endeavours, but it is all in vain; *they shall reap thorns*, that is, that which shall prove very grievous and vexatious to them. Instead of helping themselves, they shall but make themselves more uneasy. *They have put themselves to pain*, both with their labour and with their expectations, *but it shall not profit*; they shall not prevail to extricate themselves out of the difficulties into which they have plunged themselves. *They shall be ashamed of your revenues*, ashamed that they have depended so much upon their preparations for war and particularly upon their ability to bear the charges of it." Money constitutes the sinews of war; they thought they had enough of that, but shall be ashamed of it; for their silver and gold shall not profit them in the day of the Lord's anger.

14 Thus saith the LORD against all mine evil neighbours, that touch the inheritance which I have caused my people Israel to inherit; Behold, I will pluck them out of their land, and pluck out the house of Judah from among them. 15 And it shall come to pass, after that I have plucked them out I will return, and have compassion on them, and will bring them again, every man to his heritage, and every man to his land. 16 And it shall come to pass, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name, The LORD liveth; as they taught my people to swear by Baal; then shall they be built in the midst of my people. 17 But if they will not obey, I will ut-

terly pluck up and destroy that nation, saith the LORD.

The prophets sometimes, in God's name, delivered messages both of judgment and mercy to the nations that bordered on the land of Israel: but here is a message to all those in general who had in their turns been one way or other injurious to God's people, had either oppressed them or triumphed in their being oppressed. Observe,

I. What the quarrel was that God had with them. They were *his evil neighbours* (v. 14), evil neighbours to his church, and what they did against it he took as done against himself, and therefore called them *his evil neighbours*, that should have been neighbourly to Israel, but were quite otherwise. Note, It is often the lot of good people to live among bad neighbours, that are unkind and provoking to them; and it is bad indeed when they are all so. These evil neighbours were the Moabites, Ammonites, Syrians, Edomites, Egyptians, that had been evil neighbours to Israel in helping to debauch them and draw them from God (therefore God calls them his evil neighbours), and now they helped to make them desolate, and joined with the Chaldeans against them. It is just with God to make those the instruments of trouble to us whom we have made instruments of sin. That which God lays to their charge is: *They have meddled with the inheritance which I have caused my people Israel to inherit*; they unjustly seized that which was none of their own: nay, they sacrilegiously turned that to their own use which was given to God's peculiar people. He that said, *Touch not my anointed*, said also, "*Touch not their inheritance*"; it is at your peril if you do." Not only the persons but the estates of God's people are under his protection.

II. What course he would take with them.

1. He would break the power they had got over his people, and force them to make restitution: *I will pluck out the house of Judah from among them*. This would be a great favour to God's people, who had either been taken captive by them, or, when they fled to them for shelter, had been detained and made prisoners; but it would be a great mortification to their enemies, who would be like a lion disappointed of his prey. The house of Judah either cannot or will not make any bold struggles towards their own liberty; but God will with a gracious violence pluck them out, will by his Spirit compel them to come out and by his power compel their task-masters to let them go, as he plucked Israel out of Egypt. 2. He would bring upon them the same calamities that they had been instrumental to bring upon his people: *I will pluck them out of their land*. Judgment began at the house of God, but it did not end there. Nebuchadnezzar, when he had wasted the land of Israel, turned his hand against their evil neighbours and was a scourge to them.

III. What mercy God had in store for such of them as would join themselves to him and become his people, *v.* 15, 16. They had drawn in God's backsliding people to join with them in the service of idols. If now they would be drawn by a returning people to join with them in the service of the true and living God, they should not only have their enmity to the people of God forgiven them, but the distance which they had been kept at before should be removed, and they should be received to stand upon the same level with the Israel of God. This had its accomplishment in part when, after the return out of captivity, many of the people of the lands that had been evil neighbours to Israel became Jews; and it was to have its full accomplishment in the conversion of the Gentiles to the faith of Christ. Let not Israel, though injured by them, be implacable towards them, for God is not: *After that I have plucked them out*, in justice for their sins and in jealousy for the honour of Israel, *I will return*, will change my way, and have compassion on them. Though, being heathen, they can lay no claim to the mercies of the covenant, yet they shall have benefit by the compassions of the Creator, who will notwithstanding look upon them as the work of his hands. Note, God's controversies with his creatures, though they cannot be disputed, may be accommodated. Those who (as these) have been not only strangers, but *enemies in their minds by wicked works*, may be reconciled, *Col. i.* 21. Observe here,

1. What were the terms on which God would show favour to them. It is always provided that *they will diligently learn the ways of my people*, that is, in general, the ways that they walk in when they conduct themselves as *my people* (not the crooked ways into which they have turned aside), the ways which my people are directed to take. Note, (1.) There are good ways that are peculiarly *the ways of God's people*, which, however they may differ in the choice of their paths, they are all agreed to walk in. The ways of holiness and heavenly-mindedness, of love and peaceableness, the ways of prayer and sabbath-sanctification, and diligent attendance on instituted ordinances—these, and the like, are *the ways of God's people*. (2.) Those that would have their lot with God's people, and their last end like theirs, must learn their ways and walk in them, must observe the rule they walk by and conform to that rule, must notice the steps they take by that rule and go forth by those footsteps. By an intimate conversation with God's people they must learn to do as they do. (3.) It is impossible to learn the ways of God's people as they should be learnt, without a great deal of care and pains. We must diligently observe these ways and diligently oblige ourselves to walk in them, must look diligently (*Heb. xii.* 15), and

work diligently, *Luke xiii.* 24. In particular, they must learn to give honour to God's name by making all their solemn appeals to him. They must learn to say, *The Lord liveth* (to own him, to adore him, and to abide by his judgment), *as they taught my people to swear by Baal*. It was bad enough that they did themselves swear by Baal, worse that they taught others, and worst of all that they taught God's own people, who had been better taught; and yet, if they will at length reform, they shall be accepted. Observe, [1.] We must not despair of the conversion of the worst; no, not of those who have been instrumental to pervert and debauch others; even they may be brought to repentance, and, if they be, shall find mercy. [2.] Those whom we have been industrious to draw to that which is evil, when God opens their eyes and ours, we should be as industrious to follow in that which is good. It will be a holy revenge upon ourselves to become pupils to those in the way of duty to whom we have been tutors in the way of sin. [3.] The conversion of the deceived may prove a happy occasion of the conversion even of the deceivers. Thus those who fall together into the ditch are sometimes plucked together out of it.

2. What should be the tokens and fruits of this favour when they return to God and God to them. (1.) They shall be restored to and re-established in their own land (*v.* 15): *I will bring them again every man to his heritage*. The same hand that plucked them up shall plant them again. (2.) They shall become entitled to the spiritual privileges of God's Israel: "If they will be towards, and learn the ways of my people, will conform to the rules and confine themselves to the restraints of my family, then shall they be built in the midst of my people." They shall not only be brought among them, to have a name and a place in the house of the Lord, where there was a court for the Gentiles, but they shall be built among them; they shall unite with them; the former enmities shall be slain; they shall be both edified and settled among them. See *Isa. lvi.* 5—7. Note, Those that diligently learn the ways of God's people shall enjoy the privileges and comforts of his people.

IV. What should become of those that were still wedded to their own evil ways, yea, though many of those about them turned to the Lord (*v.* 17): *If they will not obey*, if any of them continue to stand it out, *I will utterly pluck up and destroy that nation*, that family, that particular person, *saith the Lord*. Those that will not be ruled by the grace of God shall be ruined by the justice of God. And, if disobedient nations shall be destroyed, much more disobedient churches from whom better things are expected.

#### CHAP. XIII.

Still the prophet is attempting to awaken this secure and stubborn people to repentance, by the consideration of the judgments of God that were coming upon them. He is to tell them, I. By the



sign of a girdle spoiled that their pride should be stained, ver. 1—11. 11. By the sign of bottles filled with wine that their counsels should be blasted, ver. 12—14. III. In consideration hereof he is to call them to repent and humble themselves, ver. 15—21. IV. He is to convince them that it is for their obstinacy and incorrigibility that the judgments of God are so prolonged and brought to extremity, ver. 22—27.

**T**HUS saith the LORD unto me, Go and get thee a linen girdle, and put it upon thy loins, and put it *not* in water. 2 So I got a girdle according to the word of the LORD, and put *it* on my loins. 3 And the word of the LORD came unto me the second time, saying, 4 Take the girdle that thou hast got, which is upon thy loins, and arise, go to Euphrates, and hide it there in a hole of the rock. 5 So I went, and hid it by Euphrates, as the LORD commanded me. 6 And it came to pass after many days, that the LORD said unto me, Arise, go to Euphrates, and take the girdle from thence, which I commanded thee to hide there. 7 Then I went to Euphrates, and digged, and took the girdle from the place where I had hid it: and behold, the girdle was marred, it was profitable for nothing. 8 Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 9 Thus saith the LORD, After this manner will I mar the pride of Judah, and the great pride of Jerusalem. 10 This evil people, which refuse to hear my words, which walk in the imagination of their heart, and walk after other gods, to serve them, and to worship them, shall even be as this girdle, which is good for nothing. 11 For as the girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah, saith the LORD; that they might be unto me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory: but they would not hear.

Here is, I. A sign, the marring of a girdle, which the prophet had worn for some time, by hiding it in a hole of a rock near the river Euphrates. It was usual with the prophets to teach by signs, that a stupid unthinking people might be brought to consider, and believe, and be affected with what was thus set before them. 1. He was to wear a linen girdle for some time, v. 1, 2. Some think he wore it under his clothes, because it was linen, and it is said to *cleave to his loins*, v. 11. It should rather seem to be

worn upon his clothes, for it was worn for a name and a praise, and probably was a fine sash, such as officers wear and such as are commonly worn at this day in the eastern nations. He must *not put it in water*, but wear it as it was, that it might be the stronger, and less likely to rot: linen wastes almost as much with washing as with wearing. Being not wet, it was the more stiff and less apt to bend, yet he must make a shift to wear it. Probably it was very fine linen which will wear long without washing. The prophet, like John Baptist, was none of those that wore soft clothing, and therefore it would be the more strange to see him with a linen girdle on, who probably used to wear a leathern one. 2. After he had worn this linen girdle for some time, he must go, and *hide it in a hole of a rock* (v. 4) by the water's side, where, when the water was high, it would be wet, and when it fell would grow dry again, and by that means would soon rot, sooner than if it were always wet or always dry. 3. After many days, he must look for it, and he should find it quite spoiled, gone all to rags and good for nothing, v. 7. It has been of old a question among interpreters whether this was really done, so as to be seen and observed by the people, or only in a dream or vision, so as to go no further than the prophet's own mind. It seems hard to imagine that the prophet should be sent on two such long journeys as to the river Euphrates, each of which would take him up some weeks' time, when he could so ill be spared at home. For this reason most incline to think the journey, at least, was only in vision, like that of Ezekiel, from the captivity in Chaldea to Jerusalem (Ezek. viii. 3) and thence back to Chaldea (cā. xi. 24); and the explanation of this sign is given only to the prophet himself (v. 8), not to the people, the sign not being public. But there being, it is probable, at that time, great conveniences of travelling between Jerusalem and Babylon, and some part of Euphrates being not so far off but that it was made the utmost border of the land of promise (Josh. i. 4), I see no inconvenience in supposing the prophet to have made two journeys thither; for it is expressly said, *He did as the Lord commanded him*; and thus gave a signal proof of his obsequiousness to his God, to shame the stubbornness of a disobedient people: the toil of his journey would be very proper to signify both the pains they took to corrupt themselves with their idolatries and the sad fatigue of their captivity; and Euphrates being the river of Babylon, which was to be the place of their bondage, was a material circumstance in this sign.

II. The thing signified by this sign. The prophet was willing to be at any cost and pains to affect this people with the word of the Lord. Ministers must spend, and be spent, for the good of souls. We have the explanation of this sign, v. 9—11.

1. The people of Israel had been to God as this girdle in two respects:—(1.) He had taken them into covenant and communion with himself: *As the girdle cleaves* very closely to the loins of a man and surrounds him, so have I caused to cleave to me the houses of Israel and Judah. They were a people near to God (Ps. cxlviii. 14); they were his own, a peculiar people to him, a kingdom of priests that had access to him above other nations. He caused them to cleave to him by the law he gave them, the prophets he sent among them, and the favours which in his providence he showed them. He required their stated attendance in the courts of his house, and the frequent ratification of their covenant with him by sacrifices. Thus they were made so to cleave to him that one would think they could never have been parted. (2.) He had herein designed his own honour. When he took them to be to him for a people, it was that they might be to him for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory, as a girdle is an ornament to a man, and particularly the curious girdle of the ephod was to the high-priest for glory and for beauty. Note, Those whom God takes to be to him for a people he intends to be to him for a praise. [1.] It is their duty to honour him, by observing his institutions and aiming therein at his glory, and thus adorning their profession. [2.] It is their happiness that he reckons himself honoured in them and by them. He is pleased with them, and glories in his relation to them, while they behave themselves as becomes his people. He was pleased to take it among the titles of his honour to be the God of Israel, even a God to Israel, 1 Chron. xvii. 24. In vain do we pretend to be to God for a people if we be not to him for a praise.

2. They had by their idolatries and other iniquities loosed themselves from him, thrown themselves at a distance, robbed him of the honour they owed him, buried themselves in the earth, and foreign earth too, mingled among the nations, and were so spoiled and corrupted that they were good for nothing: they could no more be to God, as they were designed, for a name and a praise, for they would not hear either their duty to do it or their privilege to value it: *They refused to hear the words of God*, by which they might have been kept still cleaving closely to him. *They walked in the imagination of their heart*, wherever their fancy led them; and denied themselves no gratification they had a mind to, particularly in their worship. They would not cleave to God, but walked after other gods, to serve them, and to worship them; they doted upon the gods of the heathen nations that lay towards Euphrates, so that they were quite spoiled for the service of their own God, and were as this girdle, this rotten girdle, a disgrace to their profession and not an ornament. A thousand pities it was that such a girdle should be so spoiled, that such a people should so wretchedly degenerate.

3. God would by his judgments separate them from him, send them into captivity, deface all their beauty and ruin their excellency, so that they should be like a fine girdle gone to rags, a worthless, useless, despicable people. God will after this manner mar the pride of Judah, and the great pride of Jerusalem. He would strip them of all that which was the matter of their pride, of which they boasted and in which they trusted; it should not only be sullied and stained, but quite destroyed, like this linen girdle. Observe, He speaks of the pride of Judah (the country people were proud of their holy land, their good land), but of the great pride of Jerusalem; there the temple was, and the royal palace, and therefore those citizens were more proud than the inhabitants of other cities. God takes notice of the degrees of men's pride, the pride of some and the great pride of others; and he will mar it, he will stain it. Pride will have a fall, for God resists the proud. He will either mar the pride that is in us (that is, mortify it by his grace, make us ashamed of it, and, like Hezekiah, humble us for the pride of our hearts, the great pride, and cure us of it, great as it is; and this marring of the pride will be the making of the soul; happy for us if by humbling providences our hearts be humbled) or else he will mar the thing we are proud of. Parts, gifts, learning, power, external privileges, if we are proud of these, it is just with God to blast them; even the temple, when it became Jerusalem's pride, was marred and laid in ashes. It is the honour of God to look upon every one that is proud and abase him.

12 Therefore thou shalt speak unto them this word; Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Every bottle shall be filled with wine: and they shall say unto thee, Do we not certainly know that every bottle shall be filled with wine? 13 Then shalt thou say unto them, Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will fill all the inhabitants of this land, even the kings that sit upon David's throne, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, with drunkenness. 14 And I will dash them one against another, even the fathers and the sons together, saith the LORD: I will not pity, nor spare, nor have mercy, but destroy them. 15 Hear ye, and give ear; be not proud: for the LORD hath spoken. 16 Give glory to the LORD your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and, while



ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, *and make it gross darkness.* 17 But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for *your* pride; and mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because the LORD's flock is carried away captive. 18 Say unto the king and to the queen, Humble yourselves, sit down: for your principalities shall come down, *even* the crown of your glory. 19 The cities of the south shall be shut up, and none shall open *them*: Judah shall be carried away captive all of it, it shall be wholly carried away captive. 20 Lift up your eyes, and behold them that come from the north: where *is* the flock *that* was given thee, thy beautiful flock? 21 What wilt thou say when he shall punish thee? for thou hast taught them *to be* captains, *and* as chief over thee: shall not sorrows take thee, as a woman in travail?

Here is, I. A judgment threatened against this people that would quite intoxicate them. This doom is pronounced against them in a figure, to make it the more taken notice of and the more affecting (v. 12): *Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, every bottle shall be filled with wine*; that is, those that by their sins have made themselves *vessels of wrath fitted to destruction* shall be filled with the wrath of God as a bottle is with wine; and, as every vessel of mercy prepared for glory shall be filled with mercy and glory, so they shall *be full of the fury of the Lord* (Isa. li. 20); and they shall be brittle as bottles; and, like old bottles into which new wine is put, they shall burst and be broken to pieces, Matt. ix. 17. Or, They shall have their heads as full of wine as bottles are; for so it is explained, v. 13, *They shall be filled with drunkenness*; compare Isa. li. 17. It is probable that this was a common proverb among them, applied in various ways; but they, not being aware of the prophet's meaning in it, ridiculed him for it: "*Do we not certainly know that every bottle shall be filled with wine?*" What strange thing is there in that? Tell us something that we did not know before." Perhaps they were thus touchy with the prophet because they apprehended this to be a reflection upon them for their drunkenness, and probably it was in part so intended. *They loved flagons of wine*, Hos. iii. 1. They made their king *sick with bottles of wine*, Hos. vii. 5. Their watchmen were *all for wine*, Isa. lvi. 12. They loved their false prophets *that prophesied to them of wine* (Mic. ii. 11), that bade them be merry, for

that they should never want their bottle to make them so. "Well," says the prophet, "*you shall have your bottles full of wine, but not such wine as you desire.*" They suspected that he had some mystical meaning in it which prophesied no good concerning them, but evil; and he owns that so he had. What he meant was this,

1. That they should be as giddy as men in drink. A drunken man is fitly compared to a bottle or cask full of wine; for, when the wine is in, the wit, and wisdom, and virtue, and all that is good for any thing, are out. Now God threatens (v. 13) that they shall all be *filled with drunkenness*; they shall be full of confusion in their counsels, shall falter in all their talk and stagger in all their motions; they shall not know what they say or do, much less what they should say or do. They shall be sick of all their enjoyments and throw them up as drunken men do, Job xx. 15. They shall fall into a slumber, and be utterly unable to help themselves, and, like men that have drunk away their reason, shall lie at the mercy and expose themselves to the contempt of all about them. And this shall be the condition not of some among them (if any had been sober, they might have helped the rest), but *even the kings that sit upon the throne of David*, that should have been like their father David, who was *wise as an angel of God*, shall be thus intoxicated. Their priests and prophets too, their false prophets, that pretended to guide them, were as indulgent of their lusts, and therefore were justly as much deprived of their senses, as any other. Nay, *all the inhabitants both of the land and of Jerusalem* were as far gone as they. Whom God will destroy he infatuates.

2. That, being giddy, they should run upon one another. The cup of the wine of the Lord's fury shall throw them not only into a lethargy, so that they shall not be able to help themselves or one another, but into a perfect phrenzy, so that they shall do mischief to themselves and one another (v. 14): *I will dash a man against his brother*. Not only their drunken follies, but their drunken frays, shall help to ruin them. Drunken men are often quarrelsome, and upon that account they have *woe and sorrow* (Prov. xxiii. 29, 30); so their sin is their punishment; it was so here. God sent an evil spirit into families and neighbourhoods (as Judg. ix. 23), which made them jealous of, and spiteful towards, one another; so that *the fathers and sons went together by the ears*, and were ready to pull one another to pieces, which made them all an easy prey to the common enemy. This decree against them having gone forth, God says, *I will not pity, nor spare, nor have mercy, but destroy them*; for they *will not pity, nor spare, nor have mercy*, but destroy one another; see Hab. ii. 15, 16.

II. Here is good counsel given, which,

if taken, would prevent this desolation. It is, in short, to *humble themselves under the mighty hand of God*. If they will *hearken and give ear*, this is that which God has to say to them, *Be not proud*, v. 15. This was one of the sins for which God had a controversy with them (v. 9); let them mortify and forsake this sin, and God will let fall his controversy. "*Be not proud*"; when God speaks to you by his prophets do not think yourselves too good to be taught; be not scornful, be not wilful, let not your hearts rise against the word, nor slight the messengers that bring it to you. When God is coming forth against you in his providence (and by them he speaks) be not secure when he threatens, be not impatient when he strikes, for pride is at the bottom of both." It is the great God that has spoken, whose authority is incontestable, whose power is irresistible; therefore bow to what he says, and *be not proud*, as you have been. They must not be proud, for,

1. They must advance God, and study how to do him honour: "*Give glory to the Lord your God*, and not to your idols, not to other gods. Give him glory by confessing your sins, owning yourselves guilty before him, and accepting the punishment of your iniquity, v. 16. Give him glory by a sincere repentance and reformation." Then, and not till then, we begin to live as we should, and to some good purpose, when we begin to *give glory to the Lord our God*, to make his honour our chief end and to seek it accordingly. "*Do this quickly*, while your space to repent is continued to you; *before he cause darkness*, before he bring his judgments upon you, which you will see no way of escaping." Note, Darkness will be the portion of those that will not repent to *give glory to God*. When those that by the fourth vial were scorched with heat *repented not*, to *give glory to God*, the next vial filled them with darkness, Rev. xvi. 9, 10. The aggravation of the darkness here threatened is, (1.) That their attempts to escape shall hasten their ruin: *Their feet shall stumble* when they are making all the haste they can over the dark mountains, and they shall fall, and be unable to get up again. Note, Those that think to out-run the judgments of God will find their road impassable; let them make the best of their way, they can make nothing of it, the judgments that pursue them will overtake them; their way is dark and slippery, Ps. xxxv. 6. And therefore, before it comes to that extremity, it is our wisdom to give glory to him, and so make our peace with him, to fly to his mercy, and then there will be no occasion to fly from his justice. (2.) That their hopes of a better state of things will be disappointed: *While you look for light*, for comfort and relief, he will turn it into the shadow of death, which is very dismal and terrible, and make it gross darkness, like that of Egypt, when Pharaoh continued

to harden his heart, which was darkness that might be felt. The expectation of impenitent sinners perishes when they die and think to have it satisfied.

2. They must abase themselves, and take shame to themselves; the prerogative of the king and queen will not exempt them from this (v. 18): "*Say to the king and queen*, that, great as they are, they must *humble themselves* by true repentance, and so give both glory to God and a good example to their subjects." Note, Those that are exalted above others in the world must humble themselves before God, who is higher than the highest, and to whom kings and queens are accountable. They must *humble themselves*, and *sit down*—sit down, and consider what is coming—sit down in the dust, and lament themselves. Let them humble themselves, for God will otherwise take an effectual course to humble them: "*Your principalities shall come down*, the honour and power on which you value yourselves and in which you confide, *even the crown of your glory*, your goodly or glorious crown: when you are led away captives, where will your principality and all the badges of it be then?" Blessed be God there is a crown of glory, which those shall inherit who do humble themselves, that shall never come down.

III. This counsel is enforced by some arguments if they continue proud and unhumbléd.

1. It will be the prophet's unspeakable grief (v. 17): "*If you will not hear it*, will not submit to the word, but continue refractory, not only my eye, but *my soul shall weep in secret places*." Note, The obstinacy of people, in refusing to hear the word of God, will be heart-breaking to their poor ministers, who know something of the terrors of the Lord and the worth of souls, and are so far from desiring that they tremble at the thoughts of the death of sinners. His grief for it was undissembled (his soul wept) and void of affectation, for he chose to weep in secret places, where no eye saw him but his who is all eye. He would mingle his tears not only with his public preaching, but with his private devotions. Nay, thoughts of their case would make him melancholy, and he would become a perfect recluse. It would grieve him, (1.) To see their sins unrepented of: "*My soul shall weep for your pride*, your haughtiness, and stubbornness, and vain confidence." Note, The sins of others should be matter of sorrow to us. We must mourn for that which we cannot mend, and mourn the more for it because we cannot mend it. (2.) To see their calamity past redress and remedy: "*My eyes shall weep sorely*, not so much because my relations, friends, and neighbours are in distress, but *because the Lord's flock*, his people and the sheep of his pasture, *are carried away captive*." That



should always grieve us most by which God's honour suffers and the interest of his kingdom is weakened.

2. It will be their own inevitable ruin, v. 19—21. (1.) The land shall be laid waste: *The cities of the south shall be shut up.* The cities of Judah lay in the southern part of the land of Canaan; these shall be straitly besieged by the enemy, so that there shall be no going in and out, or they shall be deserted by the inhabitants, that there shall be none to go in and out. Some understand it of the cities of Egypt, which was south from Judah; the places there whence they expected succours shall fail them, and they shall find no access to them. (2.) The inhabitants shall be hurried away into a foreign country, there to live in slavery: *Judah shall be carried away captive.* Some were already carried off, which they hoped might serve to answer the prediction, and that the residue should still be left; but no: *It shall be carried away all of it.* God will make a full end with them: *It shall be wholly carried away.* So it was in the last captivity under Zedekiah, because they repented not. (3.) The enemy was now at hand that should do this (v. 20): *Lift up your eyes.* I see upon their march, and you may if you will behold, those that come from the north, from the land of the Chaldeans; see how fast they advance, how fierce they appear." Upon this he addresses himself to the king, or rather (because the pronouns are feminine) to the city or state. [1.] "What will you do now with the people who are committed to your charge, and whom you ought to protect? *Where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock?* Whither canst thou take them now for shelter? How can they escape these ravening wolves?" Magistrates must look upon themselves as shepherds, and those that are under their charge as their flock, which they are entrusted with the care of and must give an account of; they must take delight in them as their beautiful flock, and consider what to do for their safety in times of public danger. Masters of families, who neglect their children and suffer them to perish for want of a good education, and ministers who neglect their people, should think they hear God putting this question to them. *Where is the flock that was given thee to feed, that beautiful flock?* It is starved; it is left exposed to the beasts of prey. What account wilt thou give of them when the chief shepherd shall appear? [2.] "What have you to object against the equity of God's proceedings? *What wilt thou say when he shall visit upon thee* the former days? v. 21. Thou canst say nothing, but that *God is just in all that is brought upon thee.*" Those that flatter themselves with hopes of impunity, what will they say? What confusion will cover their faces when they shall find themselves deceived and that God punishes them! [3.] "What thoughts

will you now have of your own folly, in giving the Chaldeans such power over you, by seeking to them for assistance, and joining in league with them? *Thus thou hast taught them against thyself to be captains and to become the head.*" Hezekiah began when he showed his treasures to the ambassadors of the king of Babylon, tempting him thereby to come and plunder him. Those who, having a God to trust to, court foreign alliances and confide in them, do but make rods for themselves and teach their neighbours how to become their masters. [4.] "How will you bear the trouble that is at the door? *Shall not sorrows take thee as a woman in travail?* Sorrows which thou canst not escape nor put off, extremity of sorrows; and in these respects more grievous than those of a woman in travail that they were not expected before, and that there is no man-child to be born, the joy of which shall make them afterwards to be forgotten."

22 And if thou say in thine heart, Wherefore come these things upon me? For the greatness of thine iniquity are thy skirts discovered, and thy heels made bare. 23 Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? *then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.* 24 Therefore will I scatter them as the stubble that passeth away by the wind of the wilderness. 25 This is thy lot, the portion of thy measures from me, saith the Lord; because thou hast forgotten me, and trusted in falsehood. 26 Therefore will I discover thy skirts upon thy face, that thy shame may appear. 27 I have seen thine adulteries, and thy neighings, the lewdness of thy whoredom, and thine abominations on the hills in the fields. Woe unto thee, O Jerusalem! wilt thou not be made clean? when *shall it once be?*

Here is, I. Ruin threatened as before, that the Jews shall go into captivity, and fall under all the miseries of beggary and bondage, shall be stripped of their clothes, *their skirts discovered* for want of upper garments to cover them, and their *heels made bare* for want of shoes, v. 22. Thus they used to deal with prisoners taken in war, when they drove them into captivity, *naked and barefoot*, Isa. xx. 4. Being thus carried off into a strange country, they shall be scattered there, *as the stubble that is blown away by the wind of the wilderness*, and nobody is concerned to bring it together again, v. 24. If the stubble escape the fire, it shall be carried away by the wind. If one judgment do not do the work, another shall, with those

that by sin have made themselves as stubble. They shall be stripped of all their ornaments, and exposed to shame, as harlots that are carted, *v. 26*. They made their pride appear, but God will *make their shame appear*; so that those who have doted on them shall be ashamed of them.

II. An enquiry made by the people into the cause of this ruin, *v. 22*. Thou wilt say *in thy heart* (and God knows how to give a proper answer to what men say in their hearts, though they do not speak it out; *Jesus, knowing their thoughts*, replied to them, *Matt. ix. 4*), *Wherefore came these things upon me?* The question is supposed to come into the heart, 1. Of a sinner quarrelling with God and refusing to receive correction. They could not see that they had done any thing which might justly provoke God to be thus angry with them. They durst not speak it out; but in their hearts they thus charged God with unrighteousness, as if he had laid upon them more than was meet. They seek for the cause of their calamities, when, if they had not been wilfully blind, they might easily have seen it. Or, 2. Of a sinner returning to God. If there come but a penitent thought into the heart at any time (saying, *What have I done?* (*ch. viii. 6*) wherefore am I in affliction? why doth God contend with me?) God takes notice of it, and is ready by his Spirit to impress the conviction, that, sin being discovered, it may be repented of.

III. An answer to this enquiry. God will be justified when he speaks and will oblige us to justify him, and therefore will set the sin of sinners in order before them. Do they ask, *Wherefore come these things upon us?* Let them know it is all owing to themselves.

1. It is for the greatness of their iniquities, *v. 22*. God does not take advantage against them for small faults; no, the sins for which he now punishes them are of the first rate, very heinous in their own nature and highly aggravated—for the multitude of thy iniquity (so it may be read), sins of every kind and often repeated and relapsed into. Some think we are more in danger from the multitude of our smaller sins than from the heinousness of our greater sins; of both we may say, *Who can understand his errors?*

2. It is for their obstinacy in sin, their being so long accustomed to it that there was little hope left of their being reclaimed from it (*v. 23*): *Can the Ethiopian change his skin*, that is by nature black, or the leopard his spots, that are even woven into the skin? Dirt contracted may be washed off, but we cannot alter the natural colour of a hair (*Matt. v. 36*), much less of the skin; and so impossible is it, morally impossible, to reclaim and reform these people. (1.) They had been long accustomed to do evil. They were taught to do evil; they had been educated and brought up in sin; they had served

an apprenticeship to it, and had all their days made a trade of it. It was so much their constant practice that it had become a second nature to them. (2.) Their prophets therefore despaired of ever bringing them to do good. This was what they aimed at; they persuaded them to cease to do evil and learn to do well, but could not prevail. They had so long been used to do evil that it was next to impossible for them to repent, and amend, and begin to do good. Note, Custom in sin is a very great hindrance to conversion from sin. The disease that is inveterate is generally thought incurable. Those that have been long accustomed to sin have shaken off the restraints of fear and shame; their consciences are seared; the habits of sin are confirmed; it pleads prescription; and it is just with God to give those up to their own hearts' lusts that have long refused to give up themselves to his grace. Sin is the blackness of the soul, the deformity of it; it is its spot, the discolouring of it; it is natural to us, we were shapen in it, so that we cannot get clear of it by any power of our own. But there is an almighty grace that is able to change the Ethiopian's skin, and that grace shall not be wanting to those who in a sense of their need of it seek it earnestly and improve it faithfully.

3. It is for their treacherous departures from the God of truth and dependence on lying vanities (*v. 25*): "*This is thy lot*, to be scattered and driven away; this is the portion of thy measures from me, the punishment assigned thee as by line and measure; this shall be thy share of the miseries of this world; expect it, and think not to escape it: it is because thou hast forgotten me, the favours I have bestowed upon thee and the obligations thou art under to me; thou hast no sense, no remembrance, of these." Forgetfulness of God is at the bottom of all sin, as the remembrance of our Creator betimes is the happy and hopeful beginning of a holy life. "*Having forgotten me, thou hast trusted in falsehood*, in idols, in an arm of flesh, in Egypt and Assyria, in the self-flatteries of a deceitful heart." Whatever those trust to that forsake God, they will find it a broken reed, a broken cistern.

4. It is for their idolatry, their spiritual whoredom, that sin which is of all sins most provoking to the jealous God. They are exposed to a shameful calamity (*v. 26*) because they have been guilty of a shameful iniquity and yet are shameless in it (*v. 27*): "*I have seen thy adulteries* (thy inordinate fancy for strange gods, which thou hast been impatient for the gratification of, and hast even *neighed* after it), even the lewdness of thy whoredoms, thy impudence and insatiableness in them, thy eager worshipping of idols on the hills in the fields, upon the high places. This is that for which a woe is denounced against thee, O Jerusalem! nay, and many woes.

IV. Here is an affectionate expostulation



with them, in the close, upon the whole matter. Though it was adjudged next to impossible for them to be brought to do good (v. 23), yet while there is life there is hope, and therefore still he reasons with them to bring them to repentance, v. 27. 1. He reasons with them concerning the thing itself: *Wilt thou not be made clean?* Note, It is the great concern of those who are polluted by sin to be made clean by repentance, and faith, and a universal reformation. The reason why sinners are not made clean is because they will not be made clean; and herein they act most unreasonably: "*Wilt thou not be made clean?* Surely thou wilt at length be persuaded to wash thee, and make thee clean, and so be wise for thyself." 2. Concerning the time of it: *When shall it once be?* Note, It is an instance of the wonderful grace of God that he desires the repentance and conversion of sinners, and thinks the time long till they are brought to relent; but it is an instance of the wonderful folly of sinners that they put that off from time to time which is of such absolute necessity that, if it be not done some time, they are certainly undone for ever. They do not say that they will never be cleansed, but not yet; they will defer it to a more convenient season, but cannot tell us when it shall once be.

## CHAP. XIV.

This chapter was penned upon occasion of a great drought, for want of rain. This judgment began in the latter end of Josiah's reign, but, as it should seem, continued in the beginning of Jehoiakim's: for less judgments are sent to give warning of greater coming, if not prevented by repentance. This calamity was mentioned several times before, but here, in this chapter, more fully. Here is, I. A melancholy description of it, ver. 1—6. II. A prayer to God to put an end to this calamity and to return in mercy to their land, ver. 7—9. III. A severe threatening that God would proceed in his controversy, because they proceeded in their iniquity, ver. 10—12. IV. The prophet's excusing the people, by laying the blame on their false prophets; and the doom passed both on the deceivers and the deceived, ver. 13—15. V. Directions given to the prophet, instead of interceding for them, to lament them; but his continuing notwithstanding to intercede for them, ver. 17—22.

**T**HE word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah concerning the dearth. 2 Judah mourneth, and the gates thereof languish; they are black unto the ground; and the cry of Jerusalem is gone up. 3 And their nobles have sent their little ones to the waters: they came to the pits, and found no water; they returned with their vessels empty; they were ashamed and confounded, and covered their heads. 4 Because the ground is chapt, for there was no rain in the earth, the ploughmen were ashamed, they covered their heads. 5 Yea, the hind also calved in the field, and forsook it, because there was no grass. 6 And the wild asses did stand in the high places, they snuffed up the wind like dragons; their eyes did fail,

because there was no grass. 7 O LORD, though our iniquities testify against us, do thou it for thy name's sake: for our backslidings are many; we have sinned against thee. 8 O the hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble, why shouldst thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night? 9 Why shouldst thou be as a man astonished, as a mighty man that cannot save? yet thou, O LORD, art in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name; leave us not.

The first verse is the title of the whole chapter: it does indeed all concern the dearth, but much of it consists of the prophet's prayers concerning it; yet these are not unfitly said to be, *The word of the Lord which came to him* concerning it, for every acceptable prayer is that which God puts into our hearts; nothing is our word that comes to him but what is first his word that comes from him. In these verses we have,

I. The language of nature lamenting the calamity. When the heavens were as brass, and distilled no dews, the earth was as iron, and produced no fruits; and then the grief and confusion were universal. 1. The people of the land were all in tears. Destroy their vines and their fig-trees and you cause all their mirth to cease, Hos. ii. 11, 12. All their joy fails with the joy of harvest, with that of their corn and wine. Judah mourns (v. 2), not for the sin, but for the trouble—for the withholding of the rain, not for the withdrawing of God's favour. The gates thereof, all that go in and out at their gates, languish, look pale, and grow feeble, for want of the necessary supports of life and for fear of the further fatal consequences of this judgment. The gates, through which supplies of corn formerly used to be brought into their cities, now look melancholy, when, instead of that, the inhabitants are departing through them to seek for bread in other countries. Even those that sit in the gates languish; they are black unto the ground, they go in black as mourners and sit on the ground, as the poor beggars at the gates are black in the face for want of food, blacker than a coal, Lam. iv. 8. Famine is represented by a black horse, Rev. vi. 5. They fall to the ground through weakness, not being able to go along the streets. The cry of Jerusalem has gone up; that is, of the citizens (for the city is served by the field), or of people from all parts of the country met at Jerusalem to pray for rain; so some. But I fear it was rather the cry of their trouble, and the cry of their sin, than the cry of their prayer. 2. The great men of the land felt from this judgment (v. 3): The nobles sent their little ones to the water, per-

haps their own children, having been forced to part with their servants because they had not wherewithal to keep them, and being willing to train up their children, when they were little, to labour, especially in a case of necessity, as this was. We find Ahab and Obadiah, the king and the lord chamberlain of his household, in their own persons, seeking for water in such a time of distress as this was, 1 Kings xviii. 5, 6. Or, rather, *their meaner ones*, their servants and inferior officers; these they sent to seek for water, which there is no living without; but there was none to be found: *They returned with their vessels empty*; the springs were dried up when there was no rain to feed them; and then *they* (their masters that sent them) *were ashamed and confounded* at the disappointment. They would not be ashamed of their sins, nor confounded at the sense of them, but were unhumbled under the reproofs of the word, thinking their wealth and dignity set them above repentance; but God took a course to make them ashamed of that which they were so proud of, when they found that even on this side hell their nobility would not purchase them a drop of water to cool their tongue. Let our reading the account of this calamity make us thankful for the mercy of water, that we may not by the feeling of the calamity be taught to value it. What is most needful is most plentiful. 3. The husbandmen felt most sensibly and immediately from it (v. 4): *The ploughmen were ashamed*, for the ground was so parched and hard that it would not admit the plough even when it was so *chapt* and cleft that it seemed as if it did not need the plough. They were ashamed to be idle, for there was nothing to be done, and therefore nothing to be expected. *The sluggard, that will not plough by reason of cold*, is not ashamed of his own folly; but the diligent husbandman, that cannot plough by reason of heat, is ashamed of his own affliction. See what an immediate dependence husbandmen have upon the divine Providence, which therefore they should always have an eye to, for they cannot plough nor sow in hope unless God *water their furrows*, Ps. lxxv. 10. 4. The case even of the wild beasts was very pitiable, v. 5, 6. Man's sin brings those judgments upon the earth which make even the inferior creatures groan: and the prophet takes notice of this as a plea with God for mercy. Judah and Jerusalem have sinned, but the hinds and the wild asses, what have they done? The hinds are pleasant creatures, lovely and loving, and particularly tender of their young; and yet such is the extremity of the case that, contrary to the instinct of their nature, they leave their young, even when they are newly calved and most need them, to seek for grass elsewhere; and, if they can find none, they *abandon* them, because not able to suckle them. It grieved not the hind so much that she had

no grass for herself as that she had none for her young, which will shame those who spend that upon their lusts which they should preserve for their families. The hind, when she has brought forth her young, is said to have *cast forth her sorrows* (Job xxxix. 3), and yet she continues her cares; but, as it follows there, she soon sees the good effect of them, for *her young ones* in a little while *grow up*, and trouble her no more, v. 4. But here the great trouble of all is that she has nothing for them. Nay, one would be sorry even for the *wild asses* (though they are creatures that none have any great affection for); for, though the *barren land* is made *their dwelling* at the best (Job xxxix. 5, 6), yet even that is now made too hot for them, so hot that they cannot breathe in it, but they get to the *highest places* they can reach, where the air is coolest, and *snuff up the wind like dragons*, like those creatures which, being very hot, are continually panting for breath. *Their eyes fail*, and so does their strength, *because there is no grass* to support them. The tame ass, that serves her owner, is welcome to *his crib* (Isa. i. 3) and has her keeping for her labour, when the *wild ass*, that *scorns the crying of the driver*, is forced to *live upon air*, and is well enough served for not serving. *He that will not labour, let him not eat.*

II. Here is the language of grace, lamenting the iniquity, and complaining to God of the calamity. The people are not forward to pray, but the prophet here prays for them, and so excites them to pray for themselves, and puts words into their mouths, which they may make use of, in hopes to speed, v. 7—9. In this prayer, 1. Sin is humbly confessed. When we come to pray for the preventing or removing of any judgment we must always acknowledge that we deserve it and a thousand times worse. We cannot hope by extenuating the crime to obtain a mitigation of the punishment, but must acknowledge that *our iniquities testify against us*. Our sins are witnesses against us, and true penitents see them to be such. They testify, for they are plain and evident; we cannot deny the charge. They testify against us, for our conviction, which tends to our present shame and confusion, and our future condemnation. They disprove and overthrow all our pleas for ourselves; and so not only accuse us, but answer against us. If we boast of our own excellencies, and trust to our own righteousness, our iniquities testify against us, and prove us perverse. If we quarrel with God as dealing unjustly or unkindly with us in afflicting us, our iniquities testify against us that we do him wrong; “for our *backslidings are many* and our revolts are great, whereby we have sinned against thee—too numerous to be concealed, for they are many, too heinous to be excused, for they are against thee.” 2. Mercy is earnestly begged: “*Though our iniquities testify*



against us, and against the granting of the favour which the necessity of our case calls for, yet *do thou it*." They do not say particularly what they would have done; but, as becomes penitents and beggars, they refer the matter to God: "Do with us as thou thinkest fit," Judg. x. 15. Not, *Do thou it* in this way or at this time, but, "*Do thou it for thy name's sake* ; do that which will be most for the glory of thy name." Note, Our best pleas in prayer are those that are fetched from the glory of God's own name. "Lord, do it, that thy mercy may be magnified, thy promise fulfilled, and thy interest in the world kept up; we have nothing to plead in ourselves, but every thing in thee." There is another petition in this prayer, and it is a very modest one (v. 9): "*Leave us not, withdraw not thy favour and presence*." Note, We should dread and deprecate God's departure from us more than the removal of any or all our creature-comforts. 3. Their relation to God, their interest in him, and their expectations from him grounded thereupon, are most pathetically pleaded with him, v. 8, 9. (1.) They look upon him as one they have reason to think should deliver them when they are in distress, yea, though their iniquities testify against them; for in him mercy has often rejoiced against judgment. The prophet, like Moses of old, is willing to make the best he can of the ease of his people, and therefore, though he must own that they have sinned many a great sin (Exod. xxxii. 31), yet he pleads, *Thou art the hope of Israel*. God has encouraged his people to hope in him; in calling himself so often the *God of Israel*, the *rock of Israel*, and the *Holy One of Israel*, he has made himself the *hope of Israel*. He has given Israel his word to hope in, and caused them to hope in it; and there are those yet in Israel that make God alone their hope, and expect he will be *their Saviour in time of trouble*, and they look not for salvation in any other: "Thou hast many a time been such, in the time of their extremity." Note, Since God is his people's all-sufficient Saviour, they ought to hope in him in their greatest straits; and, since he is their only Saviour, they ought to hope in him alone. They plead likewise, "*Thou art in the midst of us* ; we have the special tokens of thy presence with us, thy temple, thy ark, thy oracles, and *we are called by thy name*, the *Israel of God* ; and therefore we have reason to hope thou wilt not leave us ; *we are thine, save us*. Thy name is called upon us, and therefore what evils we are under reflect dishonour upon thee, as if thou wert not able to relieve thy own." The prophet had often told the people that their profession of religion would not protect them from the judgments of God; yet here he pleads it with God, as Moses, Exod. xxxii. 11. Even this may go far as to temporal punishments with a God of mercy. *Valent quantum valere*

*potest—Let the plea avail as far as is proper.*

(2.) It therefore grieves them to think that he does not appear for their deliverance; and, though they do not charge it upon him as unrighteous, they humbly plead it with him why he should be gracious, for the glory of his own name. For otherwise he will seem, [1.] Unconcerned for his own people: *What will the Egyptians say?* They will say, "Israel's hope and Saviour does not mind them; he has become *as a stranger in the land*, that does not at all interest himself in its interests; his temple, which he called *his rest for ever*, is no more so, but he is in it *as a wayfaring man, that turns aside to tarry but for a night* in an inn, which he never enquires into the affairs of, nor is in any care about." Though God never is, yet he sometimes seems to be, as if he cared not what became of his church: Christ slept when his disciples were in a storm. [2.] Incapable of giving them any relief. The enemies once said, *Because the Lord was not able to bring his people to Canaan, he let them perish in the wilderness* (Num. xiv. 16); so now they will say, "Either his wisdom or his power fails him; either he is *as a man astonished* (who, though he has the reason of a man, yet, being astonished, is quite at a loss and at his wits' end) or as a *mighty man* who is overpowered by such as are more mighty, and therefore *cannot save* ; though mighty, yet a man, and therefore having his power limited." Either of these would be a most insufferable reproach to the divine perfections; and therefore, why has the God that we are sure is *in the midst of us* become *as a stranger?* Why does the almighty God seem as if he were no more than a mighty man, who, when he is astonished, though he would, yet cannot save? It becomes us in prayer to show ourselves concerned more for God's glory than for our own comfort. Lord, *what wilt thou do unto thy great name?*

10 Thus saith the LORD unto this people, Thus have they loved to wander, they have not refrained their feet, therefore the LORD doth not accept them; he will now remember their iniquity, and visit their sins. 11 Then said the LORD unto me, Pray not for this people for *their* good. 12 When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt-offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence. 13 Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold, the prophets say unto them, Ye shall not see the sword, neither shall ye have

famine; but I will give you assured peace in this place. 14 Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart. 15 Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that prophesy in my name, and I sent them not, yet they say, Sword and famine shall not be in this land; By sword and famine shall those prophets be consumed. 16 And the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword; and they shall have none to bury them, them, their wives, nor their sons, nor their daughters: for I will pour their wickedness upon them.

The dispute between God and his prophet, in this chapter, seems to be like that between the owner and the dresser of the vineyard concerning the barren fig-tree, Luke xiii. 7. The justice of the owner condemns it to be cut down; the clemency of the dresser intercedes for a reprieve. Jeremiah had been earnest with God, in prayer, to return in mercy to this people. Now here,

I. God overrules the plea which he had offered in their favour, and shows him that it would not hold. In answer to it thus he says concerning *this people*, v. 10. He does not say, concerning *my people*, for he disowns them, because they had broken covenant with him. It is true they were *called by his name*, and had the tokens of his presence among them; but they had sinned, and provoked God to withdraw. This the prophet had owned, and had hoped to obtain mercy for them, notwithstanding this, through intercession and sacrifice; therefore God here tells him, 1. That they were not duly qualified for a pardon. The prophet had owned that *their backslidings were many*; and, though they were so, yet there was hope for them if they returned. But *this people* show no disposition at all to return; they have wandered, and *they have loved to wander*; their backslidings have been their choice and their pleasure, which should have been their shame and pain, and therefore they will be their ruin. They cannot expect God should take up his rest with them when they take such delight in going astray from him after their idols. It is not through necessity or inadvertency that they wander, but they love to wander. Sinners are wanderers from God; their wanderings forfeit God's favour, but it is their

loving to wander that quite cuts them off from it. They were told what their wanderings would come to, that one sin would hurry them on to another, and all to ruin; and yet they have not taken warning and *refrained their feet*. So far were they from returning to their God that neither his prophets nor his judgments could prevail upon them to give themselves the least check in a sinful pursuit. This is that for which God is now reckoning with them. When he denies them rain from heaven he is *remembering their iniquity and visiting their sin*; that is it for which their *fruitful land* is thus *turned into barrenness*. 2. That they had no reason to expect that the God they had rejected should accept them; no, not though they betook themselves to fasting and prayer and put themselves to the expense of burnt-offerings and sacrifice: *The Lord doth not accept them*, v. 10. *He takes no pleasure in them* (so the word is); for what pleasure can the holy God take in those that take pleasure in his rivals, in any service, in any society, rather than his? "*When they fast* (v. 12), which is a proper expression of repentance and reformation,—*when they offer a burnt offering and an oblation*, which was designed to be an expression of faith in a Mediator,—though their prayers be thus enforced, and offered up in those vehicles that used to be acceptable, yet, because they do not proceed from humble, penitent, and renewed hearts, but still they *love to wander*, therefore *I will not hear their cry*, be it ever so loud; *nor will I accept them*, neither their persons nor their performances." It had been long since declared, *The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord*; and those only are *accepted that do well*, Gen. iv. 7. 3. That they had forfeited all benefit by the prophet's prayers for them because they had not regarded his preaching to them. This is the meaning of that repeated prohibition given to the prophet (v. 11): *Pray not thou for this people for their good*, as before, ch. vii. 16; xi. 14. This did not forbid him thus to express his *good-will* to them (Moses continued to intercede for Israel after God had said, *Let me alone*, Exod. xxxii. 10), but it forbade them to expect any good effect from it as long as they *turned away their ear from hearing the law*. Thus was the doom of the impenitent ratified, as that of Saul's rejection was by that word to Samuel, *When wilt thou cease to mourn for Saul?* It therefore follows (v. 12), *I will consume them*, not only by this famine, but by the further sore judgments of sword and pestilence; for God has many arrows in his quiver, and those that will not be convinced and reclaimed by one shall be consumed by another.

II. The prophet offers another plea in excuse for the people's obstinacy, and it is but an excuse, but he was willing to say whatever their case would bear; it is this, That the prophets, who pretended a com-



mission from heaven, imposed upon them, and flattered them with assurances of peace though they went on in their sinful way, v. 13. He speaks of it with lamentation: "*Ah! Lord God, the poor people seem willing to take notice of what comes in thy name, and there are those who in thy name tell them that they shall not see the sword nor famine; and they say it as from thee, with all the gravity and confidence of prophets: I will continue you in this place, and will give you assured peace here, peace of truth. I tell them the contrary; but I am one against many, and every one is apt to credit that which makes for them; therefore, Lord, pity and spare them, for their leaders cause them to err.*" This excuse would have been of some weight if they had not had warning given them, before, of false prophets, and rules by which to distinguish them; so that if they were deceived it was entirely their own fault. But this teaches us, as far as we can with truth, to make the best of bad, and judge as charitably of others as their case will bear.

III. God not only overrules this plea, but condemns both the blind leaders and the blind followers to fall together into the ditch.

1. God disowns the flatteries (v. 14): *They prophesy lies in my name.* They had no commission from God to prophesy at all: *I neither sent them, nor commanded them, nor spoke unto them.* They never were employed to go on any errand at all from God; he never made himself known to them, much less by them to the people; never any word of the Lord came to them, no call, no warrant, no instruction, much less did he send them on this errand, to rock them asleep in security. No; men may flatter themselves, and Satan may flatter them, but God never does. *It is a false vision, and a thing of nought.* Note, What is false and groundless is vain and worthless. The vision that is not true, be it ever so pleasing, is good for nothing; it is the *deceit of their heart*, a spider's web spun out of their own bowels, and in it they think to shelter themselves, but it will be swept away in a moment and prove a great cheat. Those that oppose their own thoughts to God's word (God indeed says so, but they think otherwise) walk in the *deceit of their heart*, and it will be their ruin. 2. He passes sentence upon the flatterers, v. 15. As for the prophets, who put this abuse upon the people by telling them they shall have peace, and this affront upon God by telling them so in God's name, let them know that they shall have no peace themselves. They shall fall first by those very judgments which they have flattered others with the hopes of an exemption from. They undertook to warrant people that *sword and famine should not be in the land*; but it shall soon appear how little their warrants are good for, when they themselves shall be cut off by sword

and famine. How should they secure others or foretel peace to them when they cannot secure themselves, nor have such a foresight of their own calamities as to get out of the way of them? Note, The sorest punishments await those who promise sinners impunity in their sinful ways. 3. He lays the flattered under the same doom: *The people to whom they prophesy lies, and who willingly suffer themselves to be thus imposed upon, shall die by sword and famine, v. 16.* Note, The unbelief of the deceived, with all the falsehood of the deceivers, shall not make the divine threatenings of no effect; sword and famine will come, whatever they say to the contrary; and those will be least safe that are most secure. Impenitent sinners will not escape the damnation of hell by saying that they can never believe there is such a thing, but will feel what they will not fear. It is threatened that this people shall not only fall by *sword and famine*, but that they shall be as it were hanged up in chains, as monuments of that divine justice which they set at defiance; their bodies shall be *cast out, even in the streets of Jerusalem*, which of all places, one would think, should be kept clear from such nuisances: there they shall lie unburied; their nearest relations, who should do them that last office of love, being so poor that they cannot afford it, or so weakened with hunger that they are not able to attend it, or so overwhelmed with grief that they have no heart to it, or so destitute of natural affection that they will not pay them so much respect. Thus will God *pour their wickedness upon them*, that is, the punishment of their wickedness; the full vials of God's wrath shall be poured upon them, to which they have made themselves obnoxious. Note, When sinners are overwhelmed with trouble they must in it see their own wickedness poured upon them. This refers to the wickedness both of the false prophets and of the people; the blind lead the blind, and both fall together into the ditch, where they will be miserable comforters one to another.

17 Therefore thou shalt say this word unto them; Let mine eyes run down with tears night and day, and let them not cease: for the virgin daughter of my people is broken with a great breach, with a very grievous blow. 18 If I go forth into the field, then behold the slain with the sword! and if I enter into the city, then behold them that are sick with famine! yea, both the prophet and the priest go about into a land that they know not. 19 Hast thou utterly rejected Judah? hath thy soul loathed Zion? why hast thou smitten us, and *there*

is no healing for us? we looked for peace, and *there is* no good; and for the time of healing, and behold trouble! 20 We acknowledge, O LORD, our wickedness, and the iniquity of our fathers: for we have sinned against thee. 21 Do not abhor us, for thy name's sake, do not disgrace the throne of thy glory: remember, break not thy covenant with us. 22 Are there *any* among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain? or can the heavens give showers? *art* not thou he, O LORD our God? therefore we will wait upon thee: for thou hast made all these things.

The present deplorable state of Judah and Jerusalem is here made the matter of the prophet's lamentation (v. 17, 18) and the occasion of his prayer and intercession for them (v. 19), and I am willing to hope that the latter, as well as the former, was by divine direction, and that these words (v. 17), *Thus shalt thou say unto them* (or concerning them, or in their hearing), refer to the intercession, as well as to the lamentation, and then it amounts to a revocation of the directions given to the prophet not to pray for them, v. 11. However, it is plain, by the prayers we find in these verses, that the prophet did not understand it as a prohibition, but only as a discouragement, like that 1 John v. 16, *I do not say he shall pray for that*. Here,

I. The prophet stands weeping over the ruins of his country; God directs him to do so, that, showing himself affected, he might, if possible, affect them with the foresight of the calamities that were coming upon them. Jeremiah must say it not only to himself, but to them too: *Let my eyes run down with tears*, v. 17. Thus he must signify to them that he certainly foresaw the sword coming, and another sort of famine, more grievous even than this which they were now groaning under; this was in the country for want of rain, that would be in the city through the straitness of the siege. The prophet speaks as if he already saw the miseries attending the descent which the Chaldeans made upon them: *The virgin daughter of my people*, that is as dear to me as a daughter to her father, *is broken with a great breach, with a very grievous blow*, much greater and more grievous than any she has yet sustained; for (v. 18) *in the field* multitudes lie dead that were *slain by the sword*, and in the city multitudes lie dying for want of food. Doleful spectacles! *The prophets and the priests*, the false prophets that flattered them with their lies and the wicked priests that persecuted the true prophets,

are now expelled their country, and *go about* either as prisoners and captives, whithersoever their conquerors lead them, or as fugitives and vagabonds, wherever they can find shelter and relief, *in a land that they know not*." Some understand this of the true prophets, Ezekiel and Daniel, that were carried to Babylon with the rest. The prophet's eyes must run down *with tears day and night*, in prospect of this, that the people might be convinced, not only that this woeful day would infallibly come, and would be a very woeful day indeed, but that he was far from desiring it, and would as gladly have brought them messages of peace as their false prophets, if he might have had warrant from heaven to do it. Note, Because God, though he inflicts death on sinners, yet delights not in it, it becomes his ministers, though in his name they pronounce the death of sinners, yet sadly to lament it.

II. He stands up to make intercession for them; for who knows but God will yet return and repent? While there is life there is hope, and room for prayer. And, though there were many among them who neither prayed themselves nor valued the prophet's prayers, yet there were some who were better affected, would join with him in his devotions, and set the seal of their *Amen* to them.

1. He humbly expostulates with God concerning the present deplorable state of their case, v. 19. It was very sad, for, (1.) Their expectations from their God failed them; they thought he had avouched Judah to be his, but now, it seems, he has *utterly rejected* it, and cast it off, will not own any relation to it nor concern for it. They thought Zion was the beloved of his soul, was his rest for ever; but now *his soul even loathes Zion*, loathes even the services there performed, for the sake of the sins there committed. (2.) Then no marvel that all their other expectations failed them: *They were smitten*, and their wounds were multiplied, but there was *no healing* for them; they *looked for peace*, because after a storm there usually comes a calm and fair weather after a long fit of wet; but *there was no good*, things went still worse and worse. They looked for a *healing time*, but could not gain so much as a *breathing time*. "*Behold, trouble at the door*, by which we hoped peace would enter. And is it so then? *Hast thou indeed rejected Judah?* Justly thou mightest. *Hath thy soul loathed Zion?* We deserve it should. But wilt thou not at length in wrath remember mercy?"

2. He makes a penitent confession of sin, speaking that language which they all should have spoken, though but few did (v. 20): "*We acknowledge our wickedness*, the abounding wickedness of our land and the iniquity of our fathers, which we have imitated, and therefore justly smart for. *We know, we*



acknowledge, that *we have sinned against thee*, and therefore thou art just in all that is brought upon upon us; but, because we confess our sins, we hope to find thee faithful and just in forgiving our sins."

3 He deprecates God's displeasure, and by faith appeals to his honour and promise, v. 21. His petition is, "*Do not abhor us* ; though thou afflict us, *do not abhor us* ; though thy hand be turned *against us*, let not thy heart be so, nor let thy mind be alienated from us." They own God might justly abhor them, they had rendered themselves odious in his eyes; yet, when they pray, *Do not abhor us*, they mean, "Receive us into favour again. *Let not thy soul loathe Zion*, v. 19. Let not our incense be an abomination." They appeal, (1.) To the honour of God, the honour of his scriptures, by which he has made himself known—his word, which he has *magnified above all his name*: "*Do not abhor us, for thy name's sake*, that name of thine by which we are called and which we call upon." The honour of his sanctuary is pleaded: "Lord, do not abhor us, for that will *disgrace the throne of thy glory*" (the temple, which is called a *glorious high throne from the beginning*, ch. xvii. 12); let not that which has been the joy of the whole earth be made a *hissing* and an *astonishment*. We deserve to have disgrace put upon us, but let it not be so as to reflect upon thyself; let not the desolations of the temple give occasion to the heathen to reproach him that used to be worshipped there, as if he could not, or would not, protect it, or as if the gods of the Chaldeans had been too hard for him. Note, Good men lay the credit of religion, and its profession in the world, nearer their hearts than any private interest or concern of their own; and those are powerful pleas in prayer which are fetched thence and great supports to faith. We may be sure that God will not *disgrace the throne of his glory* on earth; nor will he eclipse the glory of his throne by one providence without soon making it shine forth, and more brightly than before, by another. God will be no loser in his honour at the long-run. (2.) To the promise of God; of this they are humbly bold to put him in mind: *Remember thy covenant with us, and break not that covenant*. Not that they had any distrust of his fidelity, or that they thought he needed to be put in mind of his promise to them, but what he had said he would plead with himself they take the liberty to plead with him. *Then will I remember my covenant*, Lev. xxvi. 42.

4. He professes a dependence upon God for the mercy of rain, which they were now in want of, v. 22. If they have forfeited their interest in him as their God in covenant, yet they will not let go their hold on him as the God of nature. (1.) They will never make application to the idols of the heathen, for that would be foolish and fruit-

less: *Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain?* No; in a time of great drought in Israel, Baal, though all Israel presented their prayers to him in the days of Ahab, could not relieve them; it was that God only who *answered by fire* that could answer *by water* too. (2.) They will not terminate their regards in second causes, nor expect supply from nature only: *Can the heavens give showers?* No, not without orders from the God of heaven; for it is he that has the key of the clouds, that *opens the bottles of heaven and waters the earth from his chambers*. But, (3.) All their expectation therefore is from him and their confidence in him: "*Art not thou he, O Lord our God!* from whom we may expect succour and to whom we must apply? Art thou not he that *causeth rain and givest showers?* For *thou hast made all these things*; thou gavest them being, and therefore thou givest them law and hast them all at thy command; thou madest that moisture in nature which is in a constant circulation to serve the intentions of Providence, and thou directest it, and makest what use thou pleasest of it; *therefore we will wait upon thee*, and upon thee only; *we will ask of the Lord rain*, Zech. x. 1. We will trust in him to give it to us in due time, and be willing to tarry his time; it is fit that we should, and it will not be in vain to do so." Note, The sovereignty of God should engage, and his all-sufficiency encourage, our attendance on him and our expectations from him at all times.

## CHAP. XV.

When we left the prophet, in the close of the foregoing chapter, so pathetically pouring out his prayers before God, we had reason to hope that in this chapter we should find God reconciled to the land and the prophet brought into a quiet composed frame; but, to our great surprise, we find it much otherwise as to both. I. Notwithstanding the prophet's prayers, God here rattles the sentence given against the people, and abandons them to ruin, turning a deaf ear to all the intercessions made for them, ver. 1-6. II. The prophet himself, notwithstanding the satisfaction he had in communion with God, still finds himself uneasy and out of temper. 1. He complains to God of his continual struggle with his persecutors, ver. 10. 2. God assures him that he shall be taken under special protection, though there was a general desolation coming upon the land, ver. 11-14. 3. He appeals to God concerning his sincerity in the discharge of his prophetic office and thinks it hard that he should not have more of the comfort of it, ver. 15-18. 4. Fresh security is given him that, upon condition he continue faithful, God will continue his care of him and his favour to him, ver. 19-21. And thus, at length, we hope he regained the possession of his own soul.

**THEN** said the LORD unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth. 2 And it shall come to pass, if they say unto thee, Whither shall we go forth? then thou shalt tell them, Thus saith the LORD; Such as are for death, to death; and such as are for the sword, to the sword; and such as are for the famine, to the famine; and such as are for the captivity, to

the captivity. 3 And I will appoint over them four kinds, saith the LORD: the sword to slay, and the dogs to tear, and the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the earth, to devour and destroy. 4 And I will cause them to be removed into all kingdoms of the earth, because of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah king of Judah, for *that* which he did in Jerusalem. 5 For who shall have pity upon thee, O Jerusalem? or who shall bemoan thee? or who shall go aside to ask how thou doest? 6 Thou hast forsaken me, saith the LORD, thou art gone backward: therefore will I stretch out my hand against thee, and destroy thee; I am weary with repenting. 7 And I will fan them with a fan in the gates of the land; I will bereave *them* of children, I will destroy my people, *since* they return not from their ways. 8 Their widows are increased to me above the sand of the seas: I have brought upon them against the mother of the young men a spoiler at noon-day: I have caused *him* to fall upon it suddenly, and terrors upon the city. 9 She that hath borne seven languisheth: she hath given up the ghost; her sun is gone down while *it was* yet day: she hath been ashamed and confounded: and the residue of them will I deliver to the sword before their enemies, saith the LORD.

We scarcely find any where more pathetic expressions of divine wrath against a provoking people than we have here in these verses. The prophet had prayed earnestly for them, and found some among them to join with him; and yet not so much as a reprieve was gained, nor the least mitigation of the judgment; but this answer is given to the prophet's prayers, that the decree had gone forth, was irreversible, and would shortly be executed. Observe here,

I. What the sin was upon which this severe sentence was grounded. 1. It is in remembrance of a former iniquity; it is because of Manasseh, for that which he did in Jerusalem, v. 4. What that was we are told, and that it was for it that Jerusalem was destroyed, 2 Kings xxiv. 3, 4. It was for his idolatry, and *the innocent blood which he shed, which the Lord would not pardon.* He is called the son of Hezekiah because his relation to so good a father was a great aggravation of his sin, so far was it from

being an excuse of it. The greatest part of a generation was worn off since Manasseh's time, yet his sin is brought into the account; as in Jerusalem's last ruin God brought upon it all *the righteous blood shed on the earth*, to show how heavy the guilt of blood will light and lie somewhere, sooner or later, and that reprieves are not pardons. 2. It is in consideration of their present impenitence. See how their sin is described (v. 6) "*Thou hast forsaken me*, my service and thy duty to me; *thou hast gone backward* into the ways of contradiction, art become the reverse of what thou shouldst have been and of what God by his law would have led thee forward to." See how the impenitence is described (v. 7): "*They return not from their ways*, the ways of their own hearts, into the ways of God's commandments again. There is mercy for those who have turned aside if they will return; but what favour can those expect that persist in their apostasy?

II. What the sentence is. It is such as denotes no less than an utter ruin.

1. God himself abandons and abhors them: *My mind cannot be towards them.* How can it be thought that the holy God should have any remaining complacency in those that have such a rooted antipathy to him? It is not in a passion, but with a just and holy indignation, that he says, "*Cast them out of my sight*, as that which is in the highest degree odious and offensive, and *let them go forth*, for I will be troubled with them no more."

2. He will not admit any intercession to be made for them (v. 1): "*Though Moses and Samuel stood before me*, by prayer or sacrifice to reconcile me to them, yet I could not be prevailed with to admit them into favour." Moses and Samuel were two as great favourites of Heaven as ever were the blessings of this earth, and were particularly famed for the success of their mediation between God and his offending people; many a time they would have been destroyed if Moses had not stood before him in the breach; and to Samuel's prayers they owed their lives (1 Sam. xii. 19); yet even their intercessions should not prevail, no, not though they were now in a state of perfection, much less Jeremiah's, who was now *a man subject to like passions* as others. The putting of this as a case, *Though they should stand before me*, supposes that they do not, and is an intimation that saints in heaven are not intercessors for saints on earth. It is the prerogative of the Eternal Word to be the only Mediator in the other world, whatever Moses, and Samuel, and others were in this.

3. He condemns them all to one destroying judgment or other. When God casts them out of his presence, *whither shall they go forth?* v. 2. Certainly nowhere to be safe or easy, but to be met by one judgment while they are pursued by another, till they



find themselves surrounded with mischiefs on all hands, so that they cannot escape: *Such as are for death, to death.* By death here is meant the pestilence (Rev. vi. 8), for it is death without visible means. *Such as are for death to death, or for the sword to the sword;* every man shall perish in that way that God has appointed: the law that appoints the malefactor's death determines what death he shall die. Or, He that is by his own choice for this judgment, let him take it, or for that, let him take it, but by the one or the other they shall all fall and none shall escape. It is a choice like that which David was put to, and was thereby put into a great strait, 2 Sam. xxiv. 14. Captivity is mentioned last, some think, because the sorest judgment of all, it being both a complication and continuance of miseries. That of the sword is again repeated (v. 3), and is made the first of another four frightful set of destroyers, which God will appoint over them, as officers over the soldiers, to do what they please with them. As those that escape the sword shall be cut off by pestilence, famine, or captivity, so those that fall by the sword shall be cut off by divine vengeance, which pursues sinners on the other side death; there shall be dogs to tear in the city and fowls of the air and wild beasts in the field to devour. And, if there be any that think to outrun justice, they shall be made the most public monuments of it: *They shall be removed into all kingdoms of the earth* (v. 4), like Cain, who, that he might be made a spectacle of horror to all, became a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth.

4. They shall fall without being relieved. Who can do any thing to help them? for (1.) God, even their own God (so he had been) appears against them: *I will stretch out my hand against thee*, which denotes a deliberate determined stroke, which will reach far and wound deeply. *I am weary with repenting* (v. 6); it is a strange expression; they had behaved so provokingly, especially by their treacherous professions of repentance, that they had put even infinite patience itself to the stretch. God had often turned away his wrath when it was ready to break forth against them; but now he will grant no more reprieves. Miserable is the case of those who have sinned so long against God's mercy that at length they have sinned it away. (2.) Their own country expels them, and is ready to spue them out, as it had done the Canaanites that were before them; for so it was threatened (Lev. xviii. 28): *I will fan them with a fan in the gates of the land*, in their own gates, through which they shall be scattered, or *into the gates of the earth*, into the cities of all the nations about them, v. 7. (3.) Their own children, that should assist them when they speak with the enemy in the gate, shall be cut off from them: *I will bereave them of children*, so that they

shall have little hopes that the next generation will retrieve their affairs, for *I will destroy my people*; and, when the inhabitants are slain, the land will soon be desolate. This melancholy article is enlarged upon, v. 8, 9, where we have, [1.] The destroyer brought upon them. When God has bloody work to do he will find out bloody instruments to do it with. Nebuchadnezzar is here called a spoiler at noon-day, not a thief in the night, that is afraid of being discovered, but one that without fear shall break through and destroy all the fences of rights and properties, and this in the face of the sun and in defiance of its light: *I have brought against the mother a young man, a spoiler* (so some read it); for Nebuchadnezzar, when he first invaded Judah, was but a young man, in the first year of his reign. We read it, *I have brought upon them, even against the mother of the young men, a spoiler*, that is, against Jerusalem, a mother city, that had a very numerous family of young men: or that invasion was in a particular manner terrible to those mothers who had many sons fit for war, who must now hazard their lives in the high places of the field, and, being an unequal match for the enemy, would be likely to fall there, to the inexpressible grief of their poor mothers, who had nursed them up with a great deal of tenderness. The same God that brought the spoiler upon them caused him to fall upon it, that is, upon the spoil delivered to him, suddenly and by surprise; and then terrors came upon the city. The original is very abrupt—the city and terrors. O the city! what a consternation will it then be in! O the terrors that shall then seize it! Then the city and terrors shall be brought together, that seemed at a distance from each other. *I will cause to fall suddenly upon her* (upon Jerusalem) a watcher and terrors; so Mr. Gataker reads it, for the word is used for a watcher (Dan. iv. 13, 23), and the Chaldean soldiers were called watchers, ch. iv. xvi. [2.] The destruction made by this destroyer. A dreadful slaughter is here described. First, The wives are deprived of their husbands: *Their widows are increased above the sand of the seas*, so numerous have they now grown. It was promised that the men of Israel (for those only were numbered) should be as the sand of the sea for multitude; but now they shall be all cut off, and their widows shall be so. But observe, God says, *They are increased to me*. Though the husbands were cut off by the sword of his justice, their poor widows were gathered in the arms of his mercy, who has taken it among the titles of his honour to be the God of the widows. Widows are said to be taken into the number, the number of those whom God has a particular compassion and concern for. Secondly, The parents are deprived of their children: *She that has borne seven sons*, whom she expected to be the support and joy of

her age, now *languishes*, when she has seen them all cut off by the sword in one day, who had been many years her burden and care. *She that had many children has waxed feeble*, 1 Sam. ii. 5. See what uncertain comforts children are; and let us therefore rejoice in them as *though we rejoiced not*. When the children are slain the mother *gives up the ghost*, for her life was bound up in theirs: *Her sun has gone down while it was yet day*; she is bereaved of all her comforts just when she thought herself in the midst of the enjoyment of them. She is now *ashamed and confounded* to think how proud she was of her sons, how fond of them, and how much she promised herself from them. Some understand, by this languishing mother, Jerusalem lamenting the death of her inhabitants as passionately as ever poor mother bewailed her children. Many are cut off already, *and the residue of them*, who have yet escaped, and, as was hoped, were reserved to be the seed of another generation, even these *will I deliver to the sword before their enemies* (as the condemned malefactor is delivered to the sheriff to be executed), *saith the Lord*, the Judge of heaven and earth, who, we are sure, herein judges according to truth, though the judgment seem severe.

5. They shall fall without being pitied (v. 5): "*For who shall have pity on thee, O Jerusalem?*" When thy God has cast thee out of his sight, and his compassions fail and are shut up from thee, neither thy enemies nor thy friends shall have any compassion for thee. They shall have no sympathy with thee; they shall not *bemoan thee* nor be sorry for thee; they shall have no concern for thee, shall not go a step out of their way to *ask how thou dost*." For, (1.) Their friends, who were expected to do these friendly offices, were all involved with them in the calamities, and had enough to do to bemoan themselves. (2.) It was plain to all their neighbours that they had brought all this misery upon themselves by their obstinacy in sin, and that they might easily have prevented it by repentance and reformation, which they were often in vain called to; and therefore *who can pity them?* O Israel! *thou hast destroyed thyself*. Those will perish for ever unpitied that might have been saved upon such easy terms and would not. (3.) God will thus complete their misery. He will set their acquaintance, as he did Job's, at a distance from them; and his hand, his righteous hand, is to be acknowledged in all the unkindnesses of our friends, as well as in all the injuries done us by our foes.

10 Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth! I have neither lent on usury, nor men have lent to me on usury;

*yet every one of them doth curse me.* 11 The Lord said, Verily it shall be well with thy remnant; verily I will cause the enemy to entreat thee *well* in the time of evil and in the time of affliction. 12 Shall iron break the northern iron and the steel? 13 Thy substance and thy treasures will I give to the spoil without price, and *that* for all thy sins, even in all thy borders. 14 And I will make thee to pass with thine enemies into a land *which* thou knowest not: for a fire is kindled in mine anger, *which* shall burn upon you.

Jeremiah has now returned from his public work and retired into his closet; what passed between him and his God there we have an account of in these and the following verses, which he published afterwards, to affect the people with the weight and importance of his messages to them. Here is,

I. The complaint which the prophet makes to God of the many discouragements he met with in his work, v. 10.

1. He met with a great deal of contradiction and opposition. He was a *man of strife and contention to the whole land* (so it might be read, rather than to the whole earth, for his business lay only in that land); both city and country quarrelled with him, and set themselves against him, and said and did all they could to thwart him. He was a peaceable man, gave no provocation to any, nor was apt to resent the provocations given him, and yet a *man of strife*, not a man striving, but a man striven with; he was for peace, but, when he spoke, they were for war. And, whatever they pretended, that which was the real cause of their quarrels with him was his faithfulness to God and to their souls. He showed them their sins that were working their ruin, and put them into a way to prevent that ruin, which was the greatest kindness he could do them; and yet this was it for which they were incensed against him and looked upon him as their enemy. Even the prince of peace himself was thus a man of strife, a sign spoken against, continually *enduring the contradiction of sinners against himself*. And the gospel of peace brings division, even to fire and sword, Matt. x. 34, 35; Luke xii. 49, 51. Now this made Jeremiah very uneasy, even to a degree of impatience. He cried out, *Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me*, as if it were his mother's fault that she bore him, and he had better never have been born than be born to such an uncomfortable life; nay, he is angry that she had *borne him a man of strife*, as if he had been fatally determined to this by the stars that were in the ascendant at his birth. If



he had any meaning of this kind, doubtless it was very much his infirmity; we rather hope it was intended for no more than a pathetic lamentation of his own case. Note, (1.) Even those who are most quiet and peaceable, if they serve God faithfully, are often made men of strife. We can but *follow peace*; we have the making only of one side of the bargain, and therefore can but, *as much as in us lies, live peaceably*. (2.) It is very uncomfortable to those who are of a peaceable disposition to live among those who are continually picking quarrels with them. (3.) Yet, if we cannot live so peaceably as we desire with our neighbours, we must not be so disturbed at it as thereby to lose the repose of our own minds and put ourselves upon the fret.

2. He met with a great deal of contempt, contumely, and reproach. They every one of them cursed him; they branded him as a turbulent factious man, as an incendiary and a sower of discord and sedition. They ought to have blessed him, and to have blessed God for him; but they had arrived at such a pitch of enmity against God and his word that for his sake they cursed his messenger, spoke ill of him, wished ill to him, did all they could to make him odious. They all did so; he had scarcely one friend in Judah or Jerusalem that would give him a good word. Note, It is often the lot of the best of men to have the worst of characters ascribed to them. *So persecuted they the prophets*. But one would be apt to suspect that surely Jeremiah had given them some provocation, else he could not have lost himself thus: no, not the least: *I have neither lent money nor borrowed money*, have been neither creditor nor debtor; for so general is the signification of the words here. (1.) It is implied here that those who deal much in the business of this world are often involved thereby in strife and contention; *meum et tuum—mine and thine* are the great make-bates; lenders and borrowers sue and are sued, and great dealers often get a great deal of ill-will. (2.) It was an instance of Jeremiah's great prudence, and it is written for our learning, that, being called to be a prophet, he *entangled not himself in the affairs of this life*, but kept clear from them, that he might apply the more closely to the business of his profession and might not give the least shadow of suspicion that he aimed at secular advantages in it nor any occasion to his neighbours to contend with him. He *put out no money*, for he was no usurer, nor indeed had he any money to lend: he *took up no money*, for he was no purchaser, no merchant, no spendthrift. He was perfectly dead to this world and the things of it: a very little served to keep him, and we find (*ch. xvi. 2*) that he had neither wife nor children to keep. And yet, (3.) Though he behaved thus discreetly, and so as one would think should have

gained him universal esteem, yet he lay under a general odium, through the iniquity of the times. Blessed be God, bad as things are with us, they are not so bad but that there are those with whom virtue has its praise; yet let not those who behave most prudently think it strange if they have not the respect and esteem they deserve. *Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you*.

II. The answer which God gave to this complaint. Though there was in it a mixture of passion and infirmity, yet God graciously took cognizance of it, because it was *for his sake* that the prophet suffered reproach. In this answer, 1. God assures him that he should weather the storm and be made easy at last, *v. 11*. Though his neighbours quarrelled with him for what he did in the discharge of his office, yet God accepted him and promised to stand by him. It is in the original expressed in the form of an oath: "*If I take not care of thee, let me never be counted faithful; verily it shall go well with thy remnant*, with the remainder of thy life" (for so the word signifies); "the residue of thy days shall be more comfortable to thee than those hitherto have been." *Thy end shall be good*; so the Chaldee reads it. Note, It is a great and sufficient support to the people of God that, how troublesome soever their way may be, it shall be well with them in their latter end, *Ps. xxxvii. 37*. They have still a *remnant*, a *residue*, something behind and left in reserve, which will be sufficient to counterbalance all their grievances, and the hope of it may serve to make them easy. It should seem that Jeremiah, besides the vexation that his people gave him, was uneasy at the apprehension he had of sharing largely in the public judgments which he foresaw coming; and, though he mentioned not this, God replied to his thought of it, as to Moses, *Exod. iv. 19*. Jeremiah thought, "If my friends are thus abusive to me, what will my enemies be?" And God had thought fit to awaken in him an expectation of this kind, *ch. xii. 5*. But here he quiets his mind with this promise: "*Verily I will cause the enemy to entreat thee well in the time of evil*, when all about thee shall be laid waste." Note, God has all men's hearts in his hand, and can turn those to favour his servants whom they were most afraid of. And the prophets of the Lord have often met with fairer and better treatment among open enemies than among those that call themselves his people. When we see trouble coming, and it looks very threatening, let us not despair, but hope in God, because it may prove better than we expect. This promise was accomplished when Nebuchadnezzar, having taken the city, charged the captain of the guard to be kind to Jeremiah, and let him have every thing he had a mind to, *ch. xxxix. 11, 12*. The following words, *Shall iron break the northern iron, and the steel or brass?* (*v. 12*),

being compared with the promise of God made to Jeremiah (*ch. i. 18*), that he would make him an *iron pillar* and *brazen walls*, seem intended for his comfort. They were continually clashing with him, and were rough and hard as iron; but Jeremiah, being armed with power and courage from on high, is as northern iron, which is naturally stronger, and as steel, which is hardened by art; and therefore they shall not prevail against him; compare this with *Ezek. ii. 6*; *iii. 8, 9*. He might the better bear their quarrelling with him when he was sure of the victory. 2. God assures him that his enemies and persecutors should be lost in the storm, should be ruined at last, and that therein the word of God in his mouth should be accomplished and he proved a true prophet, *v. 13, 14*. God here turns his speech from the prophet to the people. To them also *v. 12* may be applied: *Shall iron break the northern iron, and the steel?* Shall their courage and strength, and the most hardy and vigorous of their efforts, be able to contest either with the counsel of God or with the army of the Chaldeans, which are as inflexible, as invincible, as the northern iron and steel. Let them therefore hear their doom: *Thy substance and thy treasure will I give to the spoil, and that without price*; the spoilers shall have it *gratis*; it shall be to them a cheap and easy prey. Observe, The prophet was poor; he neither lent nor borrowed; he had nothing to lose, neither substance nor treasure, and therefore the enemy will treat him well, *Cantabit vacuus coram latrone viator—The traveller that has no property about him will congratulate himself when accosted by a robber*. But the people that had great estates in money and land would be slain for what they had, or the enemy, finding they had much, would use them hardly, to make them confess more. And it is their own iniquity that herein corrects them: *It is for all thy sins, even in all thy borders*. All parts of the country, even those which lay most remote, had contributed to the national guilt, and all shall now be brought to account. Let not one tribe lay the blame upon another, but each take shame to itself: *It is for all thy sins in all thy borders*. Thus shall they stay at home till they see their estates ruined, and then they shall be carried into captivity, to spend the sad remains of a miserable life in slavery: *"I will make thee to pass with thy enemies, who shall lead thee in triumph into a land that thou knowest not, and therefore canst expect to find no comfort in it."* All this is the fruit of God's wrath: *"It is a fire kindled in my anger, which shall burn upon you, and, if not extinguished in time, will burn eternally."*

15 O LORD, thou knowest: remember me, and visit me, and revenge me of my persecutors; take me not away in

thy long-suffering: know that for thy sake I have suffered rebuke. 16 Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts. 17 I sat not in the assembly of the mockers, nor rejoiced; I sat alone, because of thy hand: for thou hast filled me with indignation. 18 Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, *which* refuseth to be healed? wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar, *and as waters that fail?* 19 Therefore thus saith the LORD, If thou return, then will I bring thee again, *and* thou shalt stand before me: and if thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth: let them return unto thee; but return not thou unto them. 20 And I will make thee unto this people a fenced brazen wall: and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee: for *I am* with thee to save thee and to deliver thee, saith the LORD. 21 And I will deliver thee out of the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem thee out of the hand of the terrible.

Here, as before, we have,

1. The prophet's humble address to God, containing a representation both of his integrity and of the hardships he underwent notwithstanding. It is matter of comfort to us that, whatever ails us, we have a God to go to, before whom we may spread our case and to whose omniscience we may appeal, as the prophet here, *"O Lord! thou knowest; thou knowest my sincerity, which men are resolved they will not acknowledge; thou knowest my distress, which men disdain to take notice of."* Observe here,

1. What it is that the prophet prays for, *v. 15*. (1.) That God would consider his case and be mindful of him: *"O Lord! remember me; think upon me for good."* (2.) That God would communicate strength and comfort to him: *"Visit me; not only remember me, but let me know that thou rememberest me, that thou art nigh unto me."* (3.) That he would appear for him against those that did him wrong: *Revenge me of my persecutors, or rather, Vindicate me from my persecutors*; give judgment against them, and let that judgment be executed so far as is necessary for my vindication and to compel them to acknowledge that they have done me wrong. Further than this a good man will not desire that God should



avenge him. Let something be done to convince the world that (whatever blasphemers say to the contrary) Jeremiah is a righteous man and the God whom he serves is a righteous God. (4.) That he would yet spare him and continue him in the land of the living: "*Take me not away by a sudden stroke, but in thy long-suffering lengthen out my days.*" The best men will own themselves so obnoxious to God's wrath that they are indebted to his patience for the continuance of their lives. Or, "While thou exercise long-suffering towards my persecutors, let not them prevail to take me away." Though in a passion he complained of his birth (v. 10), yet he desires here that his death might not be hastened; for life is sweet to nature, and the life of a useful man is so to grace. *I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world.*

2. What it is that he pleads with God for mercy and relief against his enemies, persecutors, and slanderers.

(1.) That God's honour was interested in this case: *Know, and make it known, that for thy sake I have suffered rebuke.* Those that lay themselves open to reproach by their own fault and folly have great reason to bear it patiently, but no reason to expect that God should appear for them. But if it is for doing well that we suffer ill, and for righteousness' sake that we have all manner of evil said against us, we may hope that God will vindicate our honour with his own. To the same purport (v. 16), *I am called by thy name, O Lord of hosts!* It was for that reason that his enemies hated him, and therefore for that reason he promised himself that God would own him and stand by him.

(2.) That the word of God, which he was employed to preach to others, he had experienced the power and pleasure of in his own soul, and therefore had the graces of the Spirit to qualify him for the divine favour, as well as his gifts. We find some rejected of God who yet could say, *Lord, we have prophesied in thy name.* But Jeremiah could say more (v. 16): "*Thy words were found, found by me*" (he searched the scripture, diligently studied the law, and found that in it which was reviving to him: if we seek we shall find), "*found for me*" (the words which he was to deliver to others were laid ready to his hand, were brought to him by inspiration), "*and I did not only taste them, but eat them, received them entirely, conversed with them intimately; they were welcome to me, as food to one that is hungry; I entertained them, digested them, turned them in succum et sanguinem—into blood and spirits, and was myself delivered into the mould of those truths which I was to deliver to others.*" The prophet was told to *eat the roll*, Ezek. ii. 8; Rev. x. 9. *I did eat it—that is, as it follows, it was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart, nothing could be more agreeable.* Understand it, [1.] Of the message itself

which he was to deliver. Though he was to foretell the ruin of his country, which was dear to him, and in the ruin of which he could not but have a deep share, yet all natural affections were swallowed up in zeal for God's glory, and even these messages of wrath, being divine messages, were a satisfaction to him. He also rejoiced, at first, in hope that the people would take warning and prevent the judgment. Or, [2.] Of the commission he received to deliver this message. Though the work he was called to was not attended with any secular advantages, but, on the contrary, exposed him to contempt and persecution, yet, because it put him in a way to serve God and do good, he took pleasure in it, was glad to be so employed, and it was his *meat and drink to do the will of him that sent him*, John iv. 34. Or, [3.] Of the promise God gave him that he would assist and own him in his work (ch. i. 8); he was satisfied in that, and depended upon it, and therefore hoped it should not fail him.

(3.) That he had applied himself to the duty of his office with all possible gravity, seriousness, and self-denial, though he had had of late but little satisfaction in it, v. 17. [1.] It was his comfort that he had given up himself wholly to the business of his office and had done nothing inconsistent with it, nothing either to divert himself from it or disfit himself for it. He kept no unsuitable company, denied himself the use even of lawful recreations, abstained from every thing that looked like levity, lest thereby he should make himself mean and less regarded. He *sat alone*, spent a great deal of time in his closet, *because of the hand of the Lord that was strong upon him to carry him on his work*, Ezek. iii. 14. "*For thou hast filled me with indignation, with such messages of wrath against this people as have made me always pensive.*" Note, It will be a comfort to God's ministers, when men despise them, if they have the testimony of their consciences for them that they have not by any vain foolish behaviour made themselves despicable, that they have been dead not only to the wealth of the world, as this prophet was (v. 10), but to the pleasures of it too, as here. But, [2.] It is his complaint that he had had but little pleasure in his work. It was at first the rejoicing of his heart, but of late it had made him melancholy, so that he had no heart to *sit in the meeting of those that make merry*. He cared not for company, for indeed no company cared for him. He *sat alone*, fretting at the people's obstinacy and the little success of his labours among them. This filled him with a holy indignation. Note, It is the folly and infirmity of some good people that they lose much of the pleasantness of their religion by the fretfulness and uneasiness of their natural temper, which they humour and indulge, instead of mortifying it.

(4.) He throws himself upon God's pity

and promise in a very passionate expostulation (v. 18): "*Why is my pain perpetual, and nothing done to ease it?* Why are the wounds which my enemies are continually giving both to my peace and to my reputation incurable, and nothing done to retrieve either my comfort or my credit? I once little thought that I should be thus neglected; will the God that has promised me his presence *be to me as a liar*, the God on whom I depend *be to me as waters that fail?*" We are willing to make the best we can of it, and to take it as an appeal, [1.] To the mercy of God: "I know he will not let the pain of his servant be perpetual, but he will ease it, will not let his wound be incurable, but he will heal it; and therefore I will not despair." [2.] To his faithfulness: "*Will thou be to me as a liar?* No; I know thou wilt not. God is not a man that he should lie. The fountain of life will never be to his people *as waters that fail.*"

II. God's gracious answer to this address, v. 19—21. Though the prophet betrayed much human frailty in his address, yet God vouchsafed to answer him with good words and comfortable words; for he knows our frame. Observe,

1. What God here requires of him as the condition of the further favours he designed him. Jeremiah had done and suffered much for God, yet God is no debtor to him, but he is still upon his good behaviour. God will own him. But, (1.) He must recover his temper, and be reconciled to his work, and friends with it again, and not quarrel with it any more as he had done. He must *return*, must shake off these distrustful discontented thoughts and passions, and not give way to them, must regain the peaceable possessor and enjoyment of himself, and resolve to be easy. Note, When we have stepped aside into any disagreeable frame or way our care must be to return and compose ourselves into a right temper of mind again; and *then* we may expect God will help us, if thus we endeavour to help ourselves. (2.) He must resolve to be faithful in his work, for he could not expect the divine protection any longer than he did approve himself so. Though there was no cause at all to charge Jeremiah with unfaithfulness, and God knew his heart to be sincere, yet God saw fit to give him this caution. Those that do their duty must not take it ill to be told their duty. In two things he must be faithful:—[1.] He must distinguish between some and others of those he preached to: Thou must *take forth the precious from the vile*. The righteous are the precious be they ever so mean and poor; the wicked are the vile be they ever so rich and great. In our congregations these are mixed, wheat and chaff in the same floor; we cannot distinguish them by name, but we must by character, and must give to each a portion, speaking comfort to precious saints and

terror to vile sinners, neither *making the heart of the righteous sad* nor *strengthening the hands of the wicked* (Ezek. xiii. 22), but *rightly dividing the word of truth*. Ministers must take those whom they see to be precious into their bosoms, and not sit alone as Jeremiah did, but keep up conversation with those they may do good to and get good by. [2.] He must closely adhere to his instructions, and not in the least vary from them: *Let them return to thee, but return not thou to them*, that is, he must do the utmost he can, in his preaching, to bring people up to the mind of God; he must tell them they must, at their peril, comply with that. Those that had flown off from him, that did not like the terms upon which God's favour was offered to them, "*Let them return to thee*, and, upon second thoughts, come up to the terms and strike the bargain; but do not thou *return to them*, do not compliment them, nor comply with them, nor think to make the matter easier to them than the word of God has made it." Men's hearts and lives must come up to God's law and comply with that, for God's law will never come down to them nor comply with them.

2. What God here promises to him upon the performance of these conditions. If he approve himself well, (1.) God will tranquillize his mind and pacify the present tumult of his spirits: *If thou return, I will bring thee again, will restore thy soul*, as Ps. xxiii. 3. The best and strongest saints, if at any time they have gone aside out of the right way, and are determined to return, need the grace of God to bring them again. (2.) God will employ him in his service as a prophet, whose work, even in those bad times, had comfort and honour enough in it to be its own wages: "*Thou shalt stand before me, to receive instructions from me, as a servant from his master; and thou shalt be as my mouth* to deliver my messages to the people, as an ambassador is the mouth of the prince that sends him." Note, Faithful ministers are God's mouth to us; they are so to look upon themselves, and to speak God's mind and *as becomes the oracles of God*; and we are so to look upon them, and to hear God speaking to us by them. Observe, If thou keep close to thy instructions, *thou shalt be as my mouth*, not otherwise; so far, and no further, God will stand by ministers, as they go by the written word. "*Thou shalt be as my mouth*, that is, what thou sayest shall be made good, as if I myself had said it." See Isa. xlv. 26; 1 Sam. iii. 19. (3.) He shall have strength and courage to face the many difficulties he meets with in his work, and his spirit shall not fail again as now it does (v. 20): "*I will make thee unto this people as a fenced broken wall*, which the storm batters and beats violently upon, but cannot shake. *Return not thou to them* by any sinful compliances, and then trust thy God to arm thee by his grace



with holy resolutions. Be not cowardly, and God will make thee daring." He had complained that he was made a *man of strife*. Expect to be so (says God); they will *fight against thee*, they will still continue their opposition, *but they shall not prevail against thee* to drive thee off from thy work nor to cut thee off from the land of the living." (4.) He shall have God for his protector and mighty deliverer: *I am with thee to save thee*. Those that have God with them have a Saviour with them who has wisdom and strength enough to deal with the most formidable enemy; and those that are with God, and faithful to him, he will deliver (v. 21) either from trouble or through it. They may perhaps fall *into the hand of the wicked*, and they may appear terrible to them, but God will rescue them *out of their hands*. They shall not be able to kill them till they have finished their testimony; they shall not prevent their happiness. God will so deliver them as to *preserve them to his heavenly kingdom* (2 Tim. iv. 18), and that is deliverance enough. There are many things that appear very frightful that yet do not prove at all hurtful to a good man.

## CHAP. XVI.

In this chapter, I. The greatness of the calamity that was coming upon the Jewish nation is illustrated by prohibitions given to the prophet neither to set up a house of his own (ver. 1—4) nor to go into the house of mourning (ver. 5—7) nor into the house of feasting, ver. 8, 9. II. God is justified in these severe proceedings against them by an account of their great wickedness, ver. 10—13. III. An intimation is given of mercy in reserve, ver. 14, 15. IV. Some hopes are given that the punishment of the sin should prove the reformation of the sinners, and that they should return to God at length in a way of duty, and so be qualified for his returns to them in a way of favour, ver. 16—21.

THE word of the Lord came also unto me, saying, 2 Thou shalt not take thee a wife, neither shalt thou have sons nor daughters in this place. 3 For thus saith the Lord concerning the sons and concerning the daughters that are born in this place, and concerning their mothers that bare them, and concerning their fathers that begat them in this land; 4 They shall die of grievous deaths; they shall not be lamented; neither shall they be buried; *but* they shall be as dung upon the face of the earth: and they shall be consumed by the sword, and by famine; and their carcases shall be meat for the fowls of heaven, and for the beasts of the earth. 5 For thus saith the Lord, Enter not into the house of mourning, neither go to lament nor bemoan them: for I have taken away my peace from this people, saith the Lord, *even* lovingkindness and mercies. 6 Both the great and the small shall die in

this land: they shall not be buried neither shall *men* lament for them nor cut themselves, nor make themselves bald for them: 7 Neither shall *men* *tear themselves* for them in mourning, to comfort them for the dead; neither shall *men* give them the cup of consolation to drink for their father or for their mother. 8 Thou shalt not also go into the house of feasting, to sit with them to eat and to drink. 9 For thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will cause to cease out of this place in your eyes, and in your days, the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride.

The prophet is here for a sign to the people. They would not regard what he said; let it be tried whether they will regard what he *does*. In general, he must conduct himself so, in every thing, as became one that expected to see his country in ruins very shortly. This he foretold, but few regarded the prediction; therefore he is to show that he is himself fully satisfied in the truth of it. Others go on in their usual course, but he, in the prospect of these sad times, is forbidden and therefore forbears marriage, mourning for the dead, and mirth. Note, Those that would convince others of and affect them with the word of God must make it appear, even in the most self-denying instances, that they do believe it themselves and are affected with it. If we would rouse others out of their security, and persuade them to sit loose to the world, we must ourselves be mortified to present things and show that we expect the dissolution of them.

I. Jeremiah must not marry, nor think of having a family and being a housekeeper (v. 2): *Thou shalt not take thee a wife*, nor think of *having sons and daughters in this place*, not in the land of Judah, not in Jerusalem, not in Anathoth. The Jews, more than any people, valued themselves on their early marriages and their numerous offspring. But Jeremiah must live a bachelor, not so much in honour of virginity as in diminution of it. By this it appears that it was advisable and seasonable only in calamitous times and times of *present distress*, 1 Cor. vii. 26. That it is so is a part of the calamity. There may be a time when it will be said, *Blessed is the womb that bears not*, Luke xxiii. 29. When we see such times at hand it is wisdom for all, especially for prophets, to keep themselves as much as may be from being *entangled with the affairs of this life* and encumbered with that which, the dearer it is to them, the more it will be the matter of their care, and fear, and grief, at such a

time. The reason here given is because the *fathers and mothers, the sons and the daughters, shall die of grievous deaths*, v. 3, 4. As for those that have wives and children, 1. They will have such a clog upon them that they cannot flee from those deaths. A single man may make his escape and shift for his own safety, when he that has a wife and children can neither find means to convey them with him nor find in his heart to go and leave them behind him. 2. They will be in continual terror for fear of those deaths; and the more they have to lose by them the greater will the terror and consternation be when death appears every where in its triumphant pomp and power. 3. The death of every child, and the aggravating circumstances of it, will be a new death to the parent. Better have no children than have them brought forth and bred up *for the murderer* (Hos. ix. 13, 14), than see them live and die in misery. Death is grievous, but some deaths are more grievous than others, both to those that die and to their relations that survive them; hence we read of *so great a death*, 2 Cor. i. 10. Two things are used a little to palliate and alleviate the terror of death as to this world, and to sugar the bitter pill—bemoaning the dead and burying them; but, to make those deaths grievous indeed, these are denied: *They shall not be lamented*, but shall be carried off, as if all the world were weary of them; nay, they *shall not be buried*, but left exposed, as if they were designed to be monuments of justice. *They shall be as dung upon the face of the earth*, not only despicable, but detestable, as if they were good for nothing but to manure the ground; being *consumed*, some *by the sword* and some *by famine*, *their carcases shall be meat for the fowls of heaven and the beasts of the earth*. Will not any one say, “Better be without children than live to see them come to this?” What reason have we to say, *All is vanity and vexation of spirit*, when those creatures that we expect to be our greatest comforts may prove not only our heaviest cares, but our sorest crosses!

II. Jeremiah must not go to the house of mourning upon occasion of the death of any of his neighbours or relations (v. 5): *Enter thou not into the house of mourning*. It was usual to condole with those whose relations were dead, to *bemoan them*, to *cut themselves*, and *make themselves bald*, which, it seems, was commonly practised as an expression of mourning, though forbidden by the law, Deut. xiv. 1. Nay, sometimes, in a passion of grief, they did *tear themselves for them* (v. 6, 7), partly in honour of the deceased, thus signifying that they thought there was a great loss of them, and partly in compassion to the surviving relations, to whom the burden will be made the lighter by their having sharers with them in their grief. They used to mourn with them, and so to *comfort them*

*for the dead*, as Job's friends with him and the Jews with Martha and Mary; and it was a friendly office to *give them a cup of consolation to drink*, to provide cordials for them and press them earnestly to drink of them for the support of their spirits, give wine to those that are of heavy heart *for their father or mother*, that it may be some comfort to them to find that, though they have lost their parents, yet they have some friends left that have a concern for them. Thus the usage stood, and it was a laudable usage. It is a good work to others, as well as of good use to ourselves, to *go to the house of mourning*. It seems, the prophet Jeremiah had been wont to abound in good offices of this kind, and it well became his character both as a pious man and as a prophet; and one would think it should have made him better beloved among his people than it should seem he was. But now God bids him not lament the death of his friends as usual, for, 1. His sorrow for the destruction of his country in general must swallow up his sorrow for particular deaths. His tears must now be turned into another channel; and there is occasion enough for them all. 2. He had little reason to lament those who died now just before the judgments entered which he saw at the door, but rather to think those happy who were seasonably *taken away from the evil to come*. 3. This was to be a type of what was coming, when there should be such universal confusion that all neighbourly friendly offices should be neglected. Men shall be in deaths so often, and even dying daily, that they shall have no time, no room, no heart, for the ceremonies that used to attend death. The sorrows shall be so ponderous as not to admit relief, and every one so full of grief for his own troubles that he shall have no thought of his neighbours. All shall be mourners then, and no comforters; every one will find it enough to bear his own burden; for (v. 5), “*I have taken away my peace from this people*, put a full period to their prosperity, deprived them of health, and wealth, and quiet, and friends, and every thing wherewith they might comfort themselves and one another.” Whatever peace we enjoy, it is God's peace; it is his gift, and, *if he give quietness, who then can make trouble?* But, if we make not a good use of his peace, he can and will take it away; and where are we then? Job xxxiv. 29. “*I will take away my peace, even my loving-kindness and mercies;*” these shall be shut up and restrained, which are the fresh springs from which all their fresh streams flow, and then farewell all good. Note, Those have cut themselves off from all true peace that have thrown themselves out of the favour of God. All is gone when God takes away from us his lovingkindness and his mercies. Then it follows (v. 6), *Both the great and the small shall die, even in this land, the land of Canaan, that used to be*



called the *land of the living*. God's favour is our life; take away that, and *we die, we perish, we all perish*.

III. Jeremiah must not go to the house of mirth, any more than to the house of mourning, *v. 8*. It had been his custom, and it was innocent enough, when any of his friends made entertainments at their houses and invited him to them, to *go and sit with them*, not merely to drink, but to *eat and to drink*, soberly and cheerfully. But now he must not take that liberty, *1*. Because it was unseasonable, and inconsistent with the providences of God in reference to that land and nation. God called aloud to *weeping, and mourning, and fasting*; he was coming forth against them in his judgments; and it was time for them to *humble themselves*; and it well became the prophet who gave them the warning to give them an example of taking the warning, and complying with it, and so to make it appear that he did himself believe it. Ministers ought to be examples of self-denial and mortification, and to show themselves affected with those terrors of the Lord with which they desire to affect others. And it becomes all the sons of Zion to sympathize with her in her afflictions, and not to be merry when she is perplexed, Amos vi. 6. *2*. Because he must thus show the people what sad times were coming upon them. His friends wondered that he would not meet them, as he used to do, in the house of feasting. But he lets them know it was to intimate to them that all their feasting would be at an end shortly (*v. 9*): "*I will cause to cease the voice of mirth*. You shall have nothing to feast on, nothing to rejoice in, but be surrounded with calamities that shall mar your mirth and cast a damp upon it." God can find ways to tame the most jovial. "*This shall be done in this place*, in Jerusalem, that used to be the *joyous city* and thought her joys were all secure to her. It shall be done *in your eyes*, in your sight, to be a vexation to you, who now look so haughty and so merry. It shall be done *in your days*; you yourselves shall live to see it." The voice of praise they had made to cease by their iniquities and idolatries, and therefore justly God made to cease among them *the voice of mirth and gladness*. The voice of God's prophets was not heard, was not heeded, among them, and therefore no longer shall *the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride*, of the songs that used to grace the nuptials, be heard among them. See *ch. vii. 34*.

10 And it shall come to pass, when thou shalt show this people all these words, and they shall say unto thee, Wherefore hath the Lord pronounced all this great evil against us? or what is our iniquity? or what is our sin that we have committed against the

LORD our God? *11* Then shalt thou say unto them, Because your fathers have forsaken me, saith the LORD, and have walked after other gods, and have served them, and have worshipped them, and have forsaken me, and have not kept my law; *12* And ye have done worse than your fathers; (for behold, ye walk every one after the imagination of his evil heart, that they may not hearken unto me;) *13* Therefore will I cast you out of this land into a land that ye know not, neither ye nor your fathers; and there shall ye serve other gods day and night; where I will not show you favour.

Here is, *1*. An enquiry made into the reasons why God would bring those judgments upon them (*v. 10*): *When thou shalt show this people all these words*, the words of this curse, they will say unto thee, *Wherefore has the Lord pronounced all this great evil against us?* One would hope that there were some among them that asked this question with a humble penitent heart, desiring to know what was the sin for which God contended with them, that they might cast it away and prevent the judgment. "Show us the Jonah that raises the storm and we will throw it overboard." But it seems here to be the language of those who quarrelled at the word of God, and challenged him to show what they had done which might deserve so severe a punishment: "*What is our iniquity? Or what is our sin?*" What crime have we ever been guilty of, proportionable to such a sentence?" Instead of humbling and condemning themselves, they stand upon their own justification and insinuate that God did them wrong in pronouncing this evil against them, that he *laid upon them more than was right*, and that they had reason to *enter into judgment with God*, Job xxxiv. 23. Note, It is amazing to see how hardly sinners are brought to justify God and judge themselves when they are in trouble, and to own the iniquity and the sin that have procured them the trouble. *2*. A plain and full answer given to this enquiry. Do they ask the prophet why, and for what reason, God is thus angry with them? He shall not stop their mouths by telling them that they may be sure there is a sufficient reason, the righteous God is never *angry without cause*, without good cause; but he must tell them particularly what is the cause, that they may be convinced and humbled, or at least that God may be justified. Let them know then, (*1*). That God visited upon them the iniquities of their fathers (*v. 11*): *Your fathers have forsaken me, and have not kept my law*. They shook

off divine institutions and grew weary of them (they thought them too plain, too mean), and then they *walked after other gods*, whose worship was more gay and pompous; and, being fond of variety and novelty, they *served them and worshipped them*; and this was the sin which God had said, in the second commandment, he would *visit upon their children*, who kept up these idolatrous usages, because they received them *by tradition from their fathers*, 1 Pet. i. 18. (2.) That God reckoned with them for their own iniquities (v. 12): "You have made your fathers' sin your own, and have become obnoxious to the punishment which in their days was deferred, for *you have done worse than your fathers*." If they had made a good use of their fathers' reprieve, and had been led by the patience of God to repentance, they would have fared the better for it and the judgment would have been prevented, the reprieve turned into a national pardon; but, making an ill use of it, and being hardened by it in their sins, they fared the worse for it, and, the reprieve having expired, an addition was made to the sentence and it was executed with the more severity. They were more impudent and obstinate in sin than their fathers, *walked every one after the imagination of his own heart*, made that their guide and rule and were resolved to follow that, on purpose that *they might not hearken to God and his prophets*. They designedly suffered their own lusts and passions to be noisy, that they might drown the voice of their consciences. No wonder then that God has taken up this resolution concerning them (v. 13): "*I will cast you out of this land, this land of light, this valley of vision*. Since you will not hearken to me, you shall not hear me; you shall be hurried away, not into a neighbouring country which you have formerly had some acquaintance and correspondence with, but into a far country, *a land that you know not, neither you nor your fathers*, in which you have no interest, nor can expect to meet with any comfortable society, to be an allay to your misery." Justly were those banished into a strange land who doted upon strange gods, which neither they nor their fathers knew, Deut. xxxii. 17. Two things would make their case there very miserable, and both of them relate to the soul, the better part; the greatest calamities of their captivity were those which affected that and debarred that from its bliss. [1.] "It is the happiness of the soul to be employed in the service of God; but *there shall you serve other gods day and night*; that is, you shall be in continual temptation to serve them and perhaps compelled to do it by your cruel task-masters; and, when you are forced to worship idols, you will be as sick of such worship as ever you were fond of it when it was forbidden you by your godly kings." See how God often makes men's sin their punishment, and *fills the backslider in heart*

*with his own ways* "You shall have no public worship at all but the worship of idols, and then you will think with regret how you slighted the worship of the true God." [2.] "It is the happiness of the soul to have some tokens of the lovingkindness of God, but you shall go to a strange land, *where I will not show you favour*." If they had had God's favour, that would have made even the land of their captivity a pleasant land; but, if they lie under his wrath, the yoke of their oppression will be intolerable to them.

14 Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that it shall no more be said, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; 15 But, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers. 16 Behold, I will send for many fishers, saith the LORD, and they shall fish them; and after will I send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain, and from every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks. 17 For mine eyes *are* upon all their ways: they are not hid from my face, neither is their iniquity hid from mine eyes. 18 And first I will recompense their iniquity and their sin double; because they have defiled my land, they have filled mine inheritance with the carcases of their detestable and abominable things. 19 O LORD, my strength, and my fortress, and my refuge in the day of affliction, the Gentiles shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and *things* wherein *there is no profit*. 20 Shall a man make gods unto himself, and they *are* no gods? 21 Therefore behold, I will this once cause them to know, I will cause them to know mine hand and my might; and they shall know that my name *is* The LORD.

There is a mixture of mercy and judgment in these verses, and it is hard to know to which to apply some of the passages here—they are so interwoven, and some seem to look as far forward as the times of the gospel.

I. God will certainly execute judgment upon them for their idolatries. Let them



expect it, for the decree has gone forth. 1. God sees all their sins, though they commit them ever so secretly and palliate them ever so artfully (v. 17): *My eyes are upon all their ways*. They have not their eye upon God, have no regard to him, stand in no awe of him; but he has his eye upon them; neither they nor their sins are *hidden from his face, from his eyes*. Note, None of the sins of sinners either can be concealed from God or shall be overlooked by him, Prov. v. 21; Job xxxiv. 21; Ps. xc. 8. 2. God is highly displeased, particularly at their idolatries, v. 18. As his omniscience convicts them, so his justice condemns them: *I will recompense their iniquity and their sin double, not double to what it deserves, but double to what they expect and to what I have done formerly*. Or I will recompense it *abundantly*; they shall now pay for their long reprieve and the divine patience they have abused. The sin for which God has a controversy with them is their having *defiled God's land* with their idolatries, and not only alienated that which he was entitled to as his inheritance, but polluted that which he dwelt in with delight as his inheritance, and made it offensive to him *with the carcasses of their detestable things*, the gods themselves which they worshipped, the images of which, though they were of gold and silver, were as loathsome to God as the putrid carcasses of men or beasts are to us. *Idols are carcasses of detestable things*. God hates them, and so should we. Or he might refer to the sacrifices which they offered to these idols, with which *the land was filled*; for they had high places in all the coasts and corners of it. This was the sin which, above any other, incensed God against them. 3. He will find out and raise up instruments of his wrath, that shall *cast them out of their land*, according to the sentence passed upon them (v. 16): *I will send for many fishers and many hunters*—the Chaldean army, that shall have many ways of ensnaring and destroying them, by fraud as fishers, by force as hunters. They shall find them out wherever they are, and shall chase and closely pursue them, to their ruin. They shall discover them wherever they are hid, in *hills or mountains, or holes of the rocks*, and shall drive them out. God has various ways of prosecuting a people with his judgments that avoid the convictions of his word. He has men at command fit for his purpose; he has them within call, and can send for them when he pleases. 4. Their bondage in Babylon shall be sorer and much more grievous than that in Egypt, their task-masters more cruel, and their lives made more bitter. This is implied in the promise (v. 14, 15), that their deliverance out of Babylon shall be more illustrious in itself, and more welcome to them, than that out of Egypt. Their slavery in Egypt came upon them gradually and almost insensibly; that

in Babylon came upon them at once and with all the aggravating circumstances of terror. In Egypt they had a Goshen of their own, but none such in Babylon. In Egypt they were used as servants that were useful, in Babylon as captives that had been hateful. 5. They shall be warned, and God shall be glorified, by these judgments brought upon them. These judgments have a voice, and speak aloud, (1.) Instruction to them. When God chastens them he teaches them. By this rod God expostulates with them (v. 20): *"Shall a man make gods to himself? Will any man be so perfectly void of all reason and consideration as to think that a god of his own making can stand him in any stead? Will you ever again be such fools as you have been, to make to yourselves gods which are no gods, when you have a God whom you may call your own, who made you, and is himself the true and living God?"* (2.) Honour to God; for he will be known by the judgments which he executes. He will first recompense their iniquity (v. 18), and then he will *this once* (v. 21)—this once for all, not by many interruptions of their peace, but this one desolation and destruction of it. *"For this once, and no more, I will cause them to know my hand, the length and weight of my punishing hand, how far it can reach and how deeply it can wound. And they shall know that my name is Jehovah, a God with whom there is no contending, who gives being to threatenings and puts life into them as well as promises."*

II. Yet he has mercy in store for them, intimations of which come in here for the encouragement of the prophet himself and of those few among them that tremble at God's word. It was said, with an air of severity (v. 13), that God would banish them into a strange land; but, that thereby they might not be driven to despair, there follow immediately words of comfort.

1. *The days will come*, the joyful days, when the same hand that dispersed them shall gather them again, v. 14, 15. They are cast out, but they are not cast off, they are not cast away. *They shall be brought up from the land of the north*, the land of their captivity, where they are held with a strong hand, *and from all the lands whither they are driven*, and where they seemed to be lost and buried in the crowd; nay, *I will bring them again into their own land*, and settle them there. As the foregoing threatenings agreed with what was written in the law, so does this promise. *Yet will I not cast them away*, Lev. xxvi. 44. *Thence will the Lord thy God gather thee*, Deut. xxx. 4. And the following words (v. 16) may be understood as a promise; God will send for fishers and hunters, the Medes and Persians, that shall find them out in the countries where they are scattered, and send them back to their own land; or Zerubbabel, and others of their own nation, who should fish

them out and hunt after them, to persuade them to return; or whatever instruments the Spirit of God made use of to *stir up their spirits to go up*, which at first they were backward to do. They began to nestle in Babylon; but, *as an eagle stirs up her nest and flutters over her young*, so God did by them, Zech. ii. 7.

2. Their deliverance out of Babylon should, upon some accounts, be more illustrious and memorable than their deliverance out of Egypt was. Both were the Lord's doing and marvellous in their eyes; both were proofs that the Lord liveth and were to be kept in everlasting remembrance, to his honour, as the living God; but the fresh mercy shall be so surprising, so welcome, that it shall even abolish the memory of the former. Not but that new mercies should put us in mind of old ones, and give us occasion to renew our thanksgivings for them; yet because we are tempted to think that the former days were better than these, and to ask, *Where are all the wonders that our fathers told us of?* as if God's arm had waxed short, and to cry up the age of miracles above the later ages, when mercies are wrought in a way of common providence, therefore we are allowed here comparatively to forget the bringing of Israel out of Egypt as a deliverance outdone by that out of Babylon. That was done *by might and power, this by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts*, Zech. iv. 6. In this there was more of pardoning mercy (the most glorious branch of divine mercy) than in that; for their captivity in Babylon had more in it of the punishment of sin than their bondage in Egypt; and therefore that which comforts Zion in her deliverance out of Babylon is this, that *her iniquity is pardoned*, Isa. xl. 2. Note, God glorifies himself, and we must glorify him, in those mercies that have no miracles in them, as well as in those that have. And, though the favours of God to our fathers must not be forgotten, yet those to ourselves in our own day we must especially give thanks for.

3. Their deliverance out of captivity shall be accompanied with a blessed reformation, and they shall return effectually cured of their inclination to idolatry, which will complete their deliverance and make it a mercy indeed. They had defiled their own land with their *detestable things*, v. 18. But, when they have smarted for so doing, they shall come and humble themselves before God, v. 19—21. (1.) They shall be brought to acknowledge that their God only is God indeed, for he is a God in need—"My strength to support and comfort me, my fortress to protect and shelter me, and my refuge to whom I may flee in the day of affliction." Note, Need drives many to God who had set themselves at a distance from him. Those that slighted him in the day of their prosperity will be glad to flee to him in the day of

their affliction. (2.) They shall be quickened to return to him by the conversion or the Gentiles: *The Gentiles shall come to thee from the ends of the earth*; and therefore shall not we come? Or, "The Jews, who had by their idolatries made themselves as Gentiles (so I rather understand it), shall come to thee by repentance and reformation, shall return to their duty and allegiance, even from the ends of the earth, from all the countries whither they were driven. The prophet comforts himself with the hope of this, and in a transport of joy returns to God the notice he had given him of it. "O Lord! my strength and my fortress, I am now easy, since thou hast given me a prospect of multitudes that shall come to thee from the ends of the earth, both of Jewish converts and of Gentile proselytes." Note, Those that are brought to God themselves cannot but rejoice greatly to see others coming to him, coming back to him. (3.) They shall acknowledge the folly of their ancestors, which it becomes them to do, when they were smarting for the sins of their ancestors: "Surely our fathers have inherited, not the satisfaction they promised themselves and their children, but lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit. We are now sensible that our fathers were cheated in their idolatrous worship; it did not prove what it promised, and therefore what have we to do any more with it?" Note, It were well if the disappointment which some have met with in the service of sin, and the pernicious consequences of it to them, might prevail to deter others from treading in their steps. (4.) They shall reason themselves out of their idolatry; and that reformation is likely to be sincere and durable which results from a rational conviction of the gross absurdity there is in sin. They shall argue thus with themselves (and it is well argued), *Should a man be such a fool, so perfectly void of the reason of a man, as to make gods to himself, the creatures of his own fancy, the work of his own hands, when they are really no gods?* v. 20. Can a man be so besotted, so perfectly lost to human understanding, as to expect any divine blessing or favour from that which pretends to no divinity but what it first received from him? (5.) They shall herein give honour to God, and make it to appear that they know both his hand in his providence and his name in his word, and that they are brought to know his name by what they are made to know of his hand, v. 21. *This once*, now at length, they shall be made to know that which they would not be brought to know by all the pains the prophets took with them. Note, So stupid are we that nothing less than the mighty hand of divine grace, known experimentally, can make us know rightly the name of God as it is revealed to us.

4. Their deliverance out of captivity shall be a type and figure of the great salvation to



be wrought out by the Messiah, who shall *gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad*. And this is that which so far outshines the deliverance out of Egypt as even to eclipse the lustre of it, and make it even to be forgotten. To this some apply that of the *many fishers and hunters*, the preachers of the gospel, who were *fishers of men*, to enclose souls with the gospel net, to find them out *in every mountain and hill*, and secure them for Christ. Then the Gentiles came to God, some *from the ends of the earth*, and turned to the worship of him from the service of dumb idols.

## CHAP. XVII.

In this chapter, I. God convicts the Jews of the sin of idolatry by the notorious evidence of the fact, and condemns them to captivity for it, ver. 1—4. II. He shows them the folly of all their carnal confidences, which should stand them in no stead when God's time came to contend with them, and that this was one of the sins upon which his controversy with them was grounded, ver. 5—11. III. The prophet makes his appeal and address to God upon occasion of the malice of his enemies against him, committing himself to the divine protection, and begging of God to appear for him, ver. 12—18. IV. God, by the prophet, warns the people to keep holy the sabbath day, assuring them that, if they did, it should be the lengthening out of their tranquillity, but that, if not, God would by some desolating judgment assert the honour of his sabbaths, ver. 19—27.

**T**HE sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond: *it is graven upon the table of their heart, and upon the horns of your altars; 2 Whilst their children remember their altars and their groves by the green trees upon the high hills. 3 O my mountain in the field, I will give thy substance and all thy treasures to the spoil, and thy high places for sin, throughout all thy borders. 4 And thou, even thyself, shalt discontinue from thine heritage that I gave thee; and I will cause thee to serve thine enemies in the land which thou knowest not: for ye have kindled a fire in mine anger, which shall burn for ever.*

The people had asked (*ch. xvi. 10*), *What is our iniquity, and what is our sin?* as if they could not be charged with any thing worth speaking of, for which God should enter into judgment with them; their challenge was answered there, but here we have a further reply to it, in which,

I. The indictment is fully proved upon the prisoners, both the fact and the fault; their sin is too plain to be denied and too bad to be excused, and they have nothing to plead either in extenuation of the crime or in arrest and mitigation of the judgment. 1. They cannot plead *Not guilty*, for their sins are upon record in the book of God's omniscience and their own conscience; nay, and they are obvious to the eye and observation of the world, *v. 1, 2*. They are *written* before God in the most legible and indelible characters, and *sealed among his treasures*,

never to be forgotten, *Deut. xxxii. 34*. They are written there with a *pen of iron and with the point of a diamond*; what is so written will not be worn out by time, but *as Job speaks, graven in the rock for ever*. Note, The sin of sinners is never forgotten till it is forgiven. It is ever before God, till by repentance it comes to be ever before us. *It is graven upon the table of their heart*; their own consciences witness against them, and are instead of a thousand witnesses. What is *graven on the heart*, though it may be covered and closed up for a time, yet, being graven, it cannot be erased, but will be produced in evidence when the books shall be opened. Nay, we need not appeal to the tables of the heart, perhaps they will not own the convictions of their consciences. We need go no further, for proof of the charge, than *the horns of their altars*, on which the blood of their idolatrous sacrifices was sprinkled, and perhaps the names of the idols to whose honour they were erected were inscribed. Their neighbours will witness against them, and all the creatures they have abused by using them in the service of their lusts. To complete the evidence, their own children shall be witnesses against them; they will tell truth when their fathers dissemble and prevaricate; they *remember the altars and the groves* to which their parents took them when they were little, *v. 2*. It appears that they were full of them, and acquainted with them betimes, they talked of them so frequently, so familiarly, and with so much delight. 2. They cannot plead that they repent, or are brought to a better mind. No, as the guilt of their sin is undeniable, so their inclination to sin is invincible and incurable. In this sense many understand *v. 1, 2*. Their sin is deeply *engraven* as with a *pen of iron in the tables of their hearts*. They have a rooted affection to it; it is woven into their very nature; their sin is dear to them, as that is dear to us of which we say, *It is engraven on our hearts*. The bias of their minds is still as strong as ever towards their idols, and they are not wrought upon either by the word or rod of God to forget them and abate their affection to them. It is written *upon the horns of their altars*, for they have given up their names to their idols and resolve to abide by what they have done; they have bound themselves, as with cords, to the horns of their altars. And *v. 2* may be read fully to this sense: *As they remember their children, so remember they their altars and their groves*; they are as fond of them and take as much pleasure in them as men do in their own children, and are as loth to part with them; they will live and die with their idols, and can no more forget them than a *woman can forget her sucking child*.

II. The indictment being thus fully proved, the judgment is affirmed and the sentence ratified, *v. 3, 4*. Forasmuch as they are thus wedded to their sins, and will not part

with them, 1. They shall be made to part with their treasures, and those shall be given into the hands of strangers. Jerusalem is God's *mountain in the field*; it was built on a hill in the midst of a plain. *All the treasures* of that wealthy city will God give to the spoil. Or, *My mountains with the fields, thy wealth and all thy treasures will I expose to spoil*; both the products of the country and the stores of the city shall be seized by the Chaldeans. Justly are men stripped of that which they have served their idols with and have made the food and fuel of their lusts. *My mountain* (so the whole land was, Ps. lxxviii. 54, Deut. xi. 11) you have turned into *your high places for sin*, have worshipped your idols upon *the high hills* (v. 2), and now they shall be given for a spoil in all your borders. What we make for a sin God will make for a spoil; for what comfort can we expect in that wherewith God is dishonoured? 2. They shall be made to part with their inheritance, with their real estates, as well as personal, and shall be carried captives into a strange land (v. 4): *Thou, even thyself* (or *thou thyself and those that are in thee*, all the inhabitants), *shall discontinue from thy heritage that I gave thee*. God owns that it was their heritage, and that he gave it to them; they had an unquestionable title to it, which was an aggravation of their folly in throwing themselves out of the possession of it. It is *through thyself* (so some read it), through thy own default, that thou art dispossessed. *Thou shalt discontinue, or intermit*, the occupation of thy land. The law appointed them to *let their land rest* (it is the word here used) one year in seven, Exod. xxiii. 11. They did not observe that law, and now God would compel them to *let it rest* (the land shall *enjoy her sabbaths*, Lev. xxvi. 34); and yet it shall be no rest to them; they shall *serve their enemies in a land they know not*. Observe, (1.) Sin works a discontinuance of our comforts and deprives us of the enjoyment of that which God has given us. Yet, (2.) A discontinuance of the possession is not a defeasance of the right, but it is intimated that upon their repentance they shall recover possession again. For the present, *you have kindled a fire in my anger*, which burns so fiercely that it seems as if it would burn *for ever*; and so it will unless you repent, for it is the anger of an everlasting God fastening upon immortal souls, and *who knows the power of that anger?*

5 Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD. 6 For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land, and

not inhabited. 7 Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. 8 For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit. 9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: Who can know it? 10 I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings. 11 As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool.

It is excellent doctrine that is preached in these verses, and of general concern and use to us all, and it does not appear to have any particular reference to the present state of Judah and Jerusalem. The prophet's sermons were not all prophetic, but some of them practical; yet this discourse, which probably we have here only the heads of, would be of singular use to them by way of caution not to misplace their confidence in the day of their distress. Let us all learn what we are taught here,

I. Concerning the disappointment and vexation those will certainly meet with who depend upon creatures for success and relief when they are in trouble (v. 5, 6): *Cursed be the man that trusts in man*. God pronounces him cursed for the affront he thereby puts upon him. Or, *Cursed* (that is, miserable) *is the man* that does so, for he leans upon a broken reed, which will not only fail him, but will *run into his hand and pierce it*. Observe, 1. The sin here condemned; it is *trusting in man*, putting that confidence in the wisdom and power, the kindness and faithfulness, of men, which should be placed in those attributes of God only, making our applications to men and raising our expectations from them as principal agents, whereas they are but instruments in the hand of Providence. It is *making flesh the arm* we stay upon, the arm we work with and with which we hope to work our point, the arm under which we shelter ourselves and on which we depend for protection. God is his people's *arm*, Isa. xxxiii. 2. We must not think to make any creature to be that to us which God has undertaken to be. Man is called *flesh*, to show the folly of those that make him their confidence; he is flesh, weak and feeble as flesh without bones or sinews,



that has no strength at all in it; he is inactive as flesh without spirit, which is a dead thing; he is mortal and dying as flesh, which soon putrefies and corrupts, and is continually wasting. Nay, he is false and sinful, and has lost his integrity; so his being flesh signifies, Gen. vi. 3. 2. The great malignity there is in this sin; it is the *departure of the evil heart of unbelief from the living God*. Those that trust in man perhaps draw nigh to God with their mouth and honour him with their lips, they call him their hope and say that they trust in him, but really *their heart departs from him*; they distrust him, despise him, and decline a correspondence with him. Cleaving to the cistern is leaving the fountain, and is resented accordingly. 3. The fatal consequences of this sin. He that puts a confidence in man puts a cheat upon himself; for (v. 6) *he shall be like the heath in the desert*, a sorry shrub, the product of barren ground, sapless, useless, and worthless; his comforts shall all fail him and his hopes be blasted; he shall wither, be dejected in himself and trampled on by all about him. *When good comes he shall not see it*, he shall not share in it; when the times mend they shall not mend with him, but he shall *inhabit the parched places in the wilderness*; his expectation shall be continually frustrated; when others have a harvest he shall have none. Those that trust to their own righteousness and strength, and think they can do well enough without the merit and grace of Christ, thus *make flesh their arm*, and their souls cannot prosper in graces or comforts; they can neither produce the fruits of acceptable services to God nor reap the fruits of saving blessings from him; they *dwell in a dry land*.

II. Concerning the abundant satisfaction which those have, and will have, who make God their confidence, who live by faith in his providence and promise, who refer themselves to him and his guidance at all times and repose themselves in him and his love in the most unquiet times, v. 7, 8. Observe, 1. The duty required of us—to *trust in the Lord*, to do our duty to him and then depend upon him to bear us out in doing it—when creatures and second causes either deceive or threaten us, either are false to us or fierce against us, to commit ourselves to God as all-sufficient both to fill up the place of those who fail us and to protect us from those who set upon us. It is to *make the Lord our hope*, his favour the good we hope for and his power the strength we hope in. 2. The comfort that attends the doing of this duty. He that does so shall be *as a tree planted by the waters*, a choice tree, about which great care has been taken to set it in the best soil, so far from being like *the heath in the wilderness*; he shall be like a tree that *spreads out its roots*, and thereby is firmly fixed, spreads them out *by the rivers*, whence it draws abundance of sap, which denotes

both the establishment and the comfort which those have who make God their hope; they are easy, they are pleasant, and enjoy a continual security and serenity of mind. A tree thus planted, thus watered, shall *not see when heat comes*, shall not sustain any damage from the most scorching heats of summer; it is so well moistened from its roots that it shall be sufficiently guarded against drought. Those that make God their hope, (1.) They shall flourish in credit and comfort, like a tree that is *always green*, whose leaf does not wither; they shall be cheerful to themselves and beautiful in the eyes of others. Those who thus give honour to God by giving him credit God will put honour upon, and make them the ornament and delight of the places where they live, as green trees are. (2.) They shall be fixed in an inward peace and satisfaction: *They shall not be careful in a year of drought*, when there is want of rain; for, as the tree has *seed in itself*, so it has *its moisture*. Those who make God their hope have enough in him to make up the want of all creature-comforts. We need not be solicitous about the breaking of a cistern as long as we have the fountain. (3.) They shall be fruitful in holiness, and in all good works. Those who trust in God, and by faith derive strength and grace from him, *shall not cease from yielding fruit*; they shall still be enabled to do that which will redound to the glory of God, the benefit of others, and their own account.

III. Concerning the sinfulness of man's heart, and the divine inspection it is always under, v. 9, 10. It is folly to trust in man, for he is not only frail, but false and deceitful. We are apt to think that we trust in God, and are entitled to the blessings here promised to those who do so. But this is a thing about which our own hearts deceive us as much as anything. We think that we trust in God when really we do not, as appears by this, that our hopes and fears rise or fall according as second causes smile or frown.

1. It is true in general. (1.) There is that wickedness in our hearts which we ourselves are not aware of and do not suspect to be there; nay, it is a common mistake among the children of men to think themselves, their own hearts at least, a great deal better than they really are. *The heart*, the conscience of man, in his corrupt and fallen state, is *deceitful above all things*. It is subtle and false; it is apt to *supplant* (so the word properly signifies); it is that from which Jacob had his name, a *supplanter*. It calls evil good and good evil, puts false colours upon things, and cries peace to those to whom peace does not belong. When men say in their hearts (that is, suffer their hearts to whisper to them) that there is no God, or he does not see, or he will not require, or they shall have peace though they go on; in these, and a thousand similar suggestions,

the heart is deceitful. It cheats men into their own ruin; and this will be the aggravation of it, that they are self-deceivers, self-destroyers. Herein the heart is *desperately wicked*; it is deadly, it is desperate. The case is bad indeed, and in a manner deplorable and past relief, if the conscience which should rectify the errors of the other faculties is itself a mother of falsehood and a ring-leader in the delusion. What will become of a man if that in him which should be *the candle of the Lord* give a false light, if God's deputy in the soul, that is entrusted to support his interests, betrays them? Such is the deceitfulness of the heart that we may truly say, *Who can know it?* Who can describe how bad the heart is? We cannot know our own hearts, not what they will do in an hour of temptation (Hezekiah did not, Peter did not), not what corrupt dispositions there are in them, nor in how many things they have turned aside; who can understand his errors? Much less can we know the hearts of others, or have any dependence upon them. But, (2.) Whatever wickedness there is in the heart God sees it, and knows it, is perfectly acquainted with it and apprised of it: *I the Lord search the heart.* This is true of all that is in the heart, all the thoughts of it, the quickest, and those that are most carelessly overlooked by ourselves—all the intents of it, the closest, and those that are most artfully disguised, and industriously concealed from others. Men may be imposed upon, but God cannot. He not only searches the heart with a piercing eye, but he tries the reins, to pass a judgment upon what he discovers, to give every thing its true character and due weight. He tries it, as the gold is tried whether it be standard or no, as the prisoner is tried whether he be guilty or no. And this judgment which he makes of the heart is in order to his passing judgment upon the man; it is *to give to every man according to his ways* (according to the desert and the tendency of them, life to those that walked in the ways of life, and death to those that persisted in the paths of the destroyer) and according to the fruit of his doings, the effect and influence his doings have had upon others, or according to what is settled by the word of God to be the fruit of men's doings, blessings to the obedient and curses to the disobedient. Note, *Therefore God is Judge himself*, and he alone, because he, and none besides, knows the hearts of the children of men.

2. It is true especially of all the deceitfulness and wickedness of the heart, all its corrupt devices, desires, and designs. God observes and discerns them; and (which is more than any man can do) he judges of the overt act by the heart. Note, God knows more evil of us than we do of ourselves, which is a good reason why we should not flatter ourselves, but always stand in awe of the judgment of God

IV. Concerning the curse that attends wealth unjustly gotten. Fraud and violence had been reigning crying sins in Judah and Jerusalem; now the prophet would have those who had been guilty of these sins, and were now stripped of all they had, to read their sin in their punishment (v. 11): *He that gets riches and not by right*, though he may make them his hope, shall never have joy of them. Observe, It is possible that those who use unlawful means to get wealth may succeed therein and prosper for a time; and it is a temptation to many to defraud and oppress their neighbours when there is money to be got by it. He who has got *treasures by vanity* and a *lying tongue* may hug himself in his success, and say, *I am rich*; nay, and I am innocent too (Hos. xii. 8), but *he shall leave them in the midst of his days*; they shall be taken from him, or he from them; God shall cut him off with some surprising stroke then when he says, *Soul, take thy ease, thou hast goods laid up for many years*, Luke xii. 19, 20. He shall leave them to he knows not whom, and shall not be able to take any of his riches away with him. It intimates what a great vexation it is to a worldly man at death that he must leave his riches behind him; and justly may it be a terror to those who got them unjustly, for, though the wealth will not follow them to another world, the guilt will, and the torment of an everlasting, *Son, remember*, Luke xvi. 25. Thus, *at his end, he shall be a fool*, a Nabal, whose wealth did him no good, which he had so sordidly hoarded, when *his heart became dead as a stone*. He was a fool all along; sometimes perhaps his own conscience told him so, but at *his end* he will appear to be so. Those are fools indeed who are fools in *their latter end*; and such multitudes will prove who were applauded as *wise men*, that did *well for themselves*, Ps. xlix. 13, 18. Those that get grace will be *wise in the latter end*, will have the comfort of it in death and the benefit of it to eternity (Prov. xix. 20); but those that place their happiness in the wealth of the world, and, right or wrong, *will be rich*, will rue the folly of it when it is too late to rectify the fatal mistake. This is like *the partridge that sits on eggs and hatches them not*, but they are broken (as Job xxxix. 15), or stolen (as Isa. x. 14), or they become addle: some sort of fowl there was, well known among the Jews, whose case this commonly was. The rich man takes a great deal of pains to get an estate together, and sits brooding upon it, but never has any comfort nor satisfaction in it; his projects to enrich himself by sinful courses miscarry and come to nothing. Let us therefore be wise in time—what we get to get it honestly, and what we have to use it charitably, that we may lay up in store a good foundation and be wise for eternity.

12 A glorious high throne from the



beginning is the place of our sanctuary. 13 O LORD, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living waters. 14 Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for thou *art* my praise. 15 Behold, they say unto me, Where *is* the word of the LORD? let it come now. 16 As for me, I have not hastened from *being* a pastor to follow thee: neither have I desired the woeful day; thou knowest: that which came out of my lips was *right* before thee. 17 Be not a terror unto me: thou *art* my hope in the day of evil. 18 Let them be confounded that persecute me, but let not me be confounded: let them be dismayed, but let not me be dismayed: bring upon them the day of evil, and destroy them with double destruction.

Here, as often before, we have the prophet retired for private meditation, and *alone with God*. Those ministers that would have comfort in their work must be much so. In his converse here with God and his own heart he takes the liberty which devout souls sometimes use in their soliloquies, to pass from one thing to another, without tying themselves too strictly to the laws of method and coherence.

I. He acknowledges the great favour of God to his people in setting up a revealed religion among them, and dignifying them with divine institutions (v. 12): *A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary*. The temple at Jerusalem, where God manifested his special presence, where the lively oracles were lodged, where the people paid their homage to their Sovereign, and whither they fled for refuge in distress, was the *place of their sanctuary*. That was a *glorious high throne*. It was a throne of holiness, which made it truly glorious; it was God's throne, which made it truly high. Jerusalem is called *the city of the great King*, not only Israel's King, but the King of the whole earth, so that it might justly be deemed the metropolis, or royal city, of the world. It was *from the beginning* so, from the first projecting of it by David and building of it by Solomon, 2 Chron. ii. 9. It was the honour of Israel that God set up such a glorious throne among them. *As the glorious and high throne* (that is, heaven) *is the place of our sanctuary*; so some read it. Note, All good men have a high value and veneration for the ordi-

nances of God, and reckon the place of the sanctuary a glorious high throne. Jeremiah here mentions this either as a plea with God for mercy to their land, in honour of the *throne of his glory*, (ch. xiv. 21), or as an aggravation of the sin of his people in forsaking God though his throne was among them, and so profaning his crown and the place of his sanctuary.

II. He acknowledges the righteousness of God in abandoning those to ruin that forsook him and revolted from their allegiance to him, v. 13. He speaks it to God, as subscribing both to the certainty and to the equity of it: *O Lord! the hope of those in Israel that adhere to thee, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed*. They must of necessity be so, for they forsake thee for lying vanities, which will deceive them and make them ashamed. They will be ashamed, for they shame themselves. They will justly be put to shame, for they have forsaken him who alone can keep them in countenance when troubles come. *Let them be ashamed* (so some read it); and so it is a pious imprecation of the wrath of God upon them, or a petition for his grace, to make them penitently ashamed. "*Those that depart from me, from the word of God which I have preached, do in effect depart from God;*" as those that return to God are said to return to the prophet, ch. xv. 19. *Those that depart from thee* (so some read it) *shall be written in the earth*. They shall soon be blotted out, as that is which is written in the dust. They shall be trampled upon and exposed to contempt. They belong to the earth, and shall be numbered among earthly people, who lay up their treasure on earth and whose names are not *written in heaven*. And they deserve to be thus written with the fools in Israel, that their folly may be made manifest unto all, because they have *forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters* (that is, spring waters), and that for broken cisterns. Note, God is to all that are his a *fountain of living waters*. There is a fulness of comfort in him, an over-flowing ever-flowing fulness, like that of a fountain; it is always fresh, and clear, and clean, like spring water, while the pleasures of sin are puddle-waters. They are free to it; it is not a *fountain sealed*. They deserve therefore to be condemned, as Adam, to *red earth*, to which by the corruption of their nature they are allied, because they have forsaken the *garden of the Lord*, which is so well watered. *Those that depart from God are written in the earth*.

III. He prays to God for healing saving mercy for himself. "If the case of those that depart from God be so miserable, let me always draw nigh to him (Ps. lxxiii. 27, 28), and, in order to that, Lord, *heal me, and save me*, v. 14. Heal my backslidings, my bent to backslide, and save me from being carried away by the strength of the stream to forsake thee." He was wounded

in spirit with grief upon many accounts. "Lord, *heal me* with thy comforts, and make me easy." He was continually exposed to the malice of unreasonable men. "Lord, *save me* from them, and let me not fall into their wicked hands. *Heal me*, that is, sanctify me by thy grace; *save me*, that is, bring me to thy glory." All that shall be saved hereafter are sanctified now; unless the disease of sin be purged out the soul cannot live. To enforce this petition he pleads, 1. The firm belief he had of God's power: *Heal thou me, and then I shall be healed*; the cure will certainly be wrought if thou undertake it; it will be a thorough cure and not a palliative one. Those that come to God to be healed ought to be abundantly satisfied in the all-sufficiency of their physician. *Save me, and then I shall certainly be saved*, be my dangers and enemies ever so threatening. If God hold us up, we shall live; if he protect us, we shall be safe. 2. The sincere regard he had to God's glory: "For thou art my praise, and for that reason I desire to be healed and saved, *that I may live and praise thee*, Ps. cxix. 175. Thou art he whom I praise, and the praise due to thee I never gave to another. Thou art he whom I glory in, and boast of, for on thee do I depend. Thou art he that furnishes me with continual matter for praise, and I have given thee the praise of the favours already bestowed upon me. *Thou shalt be my praise*" (so some read it); "heal me, and save me, and thou shalt have the glory of it. *My praise shall be continually of thee*," Ps. lxxi. 6; lxxix. 13.

IV. He complains of the infidelity and daring impiety of the people to whom he preached. It greatly troubled him, and he shows before God this trouble, as the servant that had slights put upon him by the guests he was sent to invite *came and showed his Lord these things*. He had faithfully delivered God's message to them; and what answer has he to return to him that sent him? *Behold, they say unto me, Where is the word of the Lord? Let it come now, v. 15; Isa. v. 19.* They bantered the prophet, and made a jest of that which he delivered with the greatest seriousness. 1. They denied the truth of what he said: "If that be the word of the Lord which thou speakest to us, *where is it?* Why is it not fulfilled?" Thus the patience of God was impudently abused as a ground to question his veracity. 2. They defied the terror of what he said. "Let God Almighty do his worst; let all he has said come to pass; we shall do well enough; the lion is not so fierce as he is painted," Amos v. 18. "Lord, to what purpose is it to speak to men that will neither believe nor fear?"

V. He appeals to God concerning his faithful discharge of the duty to which he was called, v. 16. The people did all they could to make him weary of his work, to

exasperate him and make him uneasy, and to tempt him to prevaricate and alter his message for fear of displeasing them; but, "Lord," says he, "*thou knowest* I have not yielded to them." 1. He continued constant to his work. His office, instead of being his credit and protection, exposed him to reproach, contempt, and injury. "Yet," says he, "*I have not hastened from being a pastor after thee*; I have not left my work, nor sued for a discharge or a *quietus*." Prophets were pastors to the people, to feed them with the good word of God; but they were to be *pastors after God*, and all ministers must be so, *according to his heart* (ch. iii. 15), to follow him and the directions and instructions he gives. Such a pastor Jeremiah was; and, though he met with as much difficulty and discouragement as ever any man did, yet he did not fly off as Jonah did, nor desire to be excused from going any more on God's errands. Note, Those that are employed for God, though their success answer not their expectations, must not therefore throw up their commission, but continue to follow God, though the storm be in their faces. 2. He kept up his affection to the people. Though they were very abusive to him, he was compassionate to them: *I have not desired the woeful day*. The day of the accomplishment of his prophecies would be a woeful day indeed to Jerusalem, and therefore he deprecated it, and wished it might never come, though, as to himself, it would be the avenging of him upon his persecutors and the proving of him a true prophet (which they had questioned, v. 15), and upon those accounts he might be tempted to desire it. Note, God does not, and therefore ministers must not, desire the death of sinners, but rather that they may turn and live. Though we warn of the woeful day, we must not wish for it, but rather weep because of it, as Jeremiah did. 3. He kept closely to his instructions. Though he might have curried favour with the people, or at least have avoided their displeasure, if he had not been so sharp in his reproofs and severe in his threatenings, yet he would deliver his message faithfully; and that he had done so was a comfort to him. "Lord, *thou knowest that that which came out of my lips was right before thee*; it exactly agreed with what I received from thee, and therefore thou art reflected upon in their quarrelling with me." Note, If what we say and do be right before God, we may easily despise the reproaches and censures of men. *It is a small thing to be judged of their judgment*.

VI. He humbly begs of God that he would own him, and protect him, and carry him on cheerfully in that work to which God had so plainly called him and to which he had so sincerely devoted himself. Two things he here desires:—1. That he might have comfort in serving the God that



sent him (v. 17): *Be not thou a terror to me.* Surely more is implied than is expressed. "Be thou a comfort to me, and let thy favour rejoice my heart and encourage me, when my enemies do all they can to terrify me and either to drive me from my work or to make me drive on heavily in it." Note, The best have that in them which might justly make God a terror to them, as he was for some time to Job (ch. vi. 4), to Asaph (Ps. lxxvii. 3), to Heman, Ps. lxxxviii. 15. And this is that which good men, *knowing the terrors of the Lord*, dread and deprecate more than any thing; nay, whatever frightful accidents may befall them, or how formidable soever their enemies may appear to them, they can do well enough so long as God is not a terror to them. He pleads, "*Thou art my hope* ; and then nothing else is my fear, no, not in the day of evil, when it is most threatening, most pressing. My dependence is upon thee; and therefore *be not a terror to me.*" Note, Those that by faith make God their confidence shall have him for their comfort in the worst of times, if it be not their own fault: if we make him our trust, we shall not find him our terror. 2. That he might have courage in dealing with the people to whom he was sent, v. 18. Those persecuted him who should have entertained and encouraged him. "Lord," says he, "*let them be confounded* (let them be overpowered by the convictions of the word and made ashamed of their obstinacy, or else let the judgments threatened be at length executed upon them), *but let not me be confounded*, let not me be terrified by their menaces, so as to betray my trust." Note, God's ministers have work to do which they need not be either ashamed or afraid to go on in, but they do need to be helped by the divine grace to go on in it without shame or fear. Jeremiah had not desired the woeful day upon his country in general; but as to his persecutors, in a just and holy indignation at their malice, he prays, *Bring upon them the day of evil*, in hope that the bringing of it upon them might prevent the bringing of it upon the country; if they were taken away, the people would be better; "*therefore destroy them with a double destruction* ; let them be utterly destroyed, root and branch, and let the prospect of that destruction be their present confusion." This the prophet prays, not at all that he might be avenged, nor so much that he might be eased, but that *the Lord* may be known by the judgments which he executes.

19 Thus said the LORD unto me; Go and stand in the gate of the children of the people, whereby the kings of Judah come in, and by the which they go out, and in all the gates of Jerusalem; 20 And say unto them, Hear ye the word of the LORD, ye kings of

Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, that enter in by these gates: 21 Thus saith the LORD; Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the sabbath-day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem; 22 Neither carry forth a burden out of your houses on the sabbath-day, neither do ye any work, but hallow ye the sabbath-day, as I commanded your fathers. 23 But they obeyed not, neither inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear, nor receive instruction. 24 And it shall come to pass, if ye diligently hearken unto me, saith the LORD, to bring in no burden through the gates of this city on the sabbath-day, but hallow the sabbath-day, to do no work therein; 25 Then shall there enter into the gates of this city kings and princes sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their princes, the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: and this city shall remain for ever. 26 And they shall come from the cities of Judah, and from the places about Jerusalem, and from the land of Benjamin, and from the plain, and from the mountains, and from the south, bringing burnt-offerings, and sacrifices, and meat-offerings, and incense, and bringing sacrifices of praise, unto the house of the LORD. 27 But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the sabbath-day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath-day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched.

These verses are a sermon concerning sabbath-sanctification. It is a word which the prophet received from the Lord, and was ordered to deliver in the most solemn and public manner to the people; for they were sent not only to reprove sin, and to press obedience, in general, but they must descend to particulars. This message concerning the sabbath was probably sent in the days of Josiah, for the furtherance of that work of reformation which he set on foot; for the promises here (v. 25, 26) are such as I think we scarcely find when things come nearer to the extremity. This message

must be proclaimed in all the places of concourse, and therefore in *the gates*, not only because through them people were continually passing and repassing, but because in them they kept their courts and laid up their stores. It must be proclaimed (as the king or queen is usually proclaimed) at the court-gate first, the gate *by which the kings of Judah come in and go out*, v. 19. Let them be told their duty first, particularly this duty; for, if sabbaths be not sanctified as they should be, *the rulers of Judah are to be contended with* (so they were, Neh. xiii. 17), for they are certainly wanting in their duty. He must also preach it *in all the gates of Jerusalem*. It is a matter of great and general concern; therefore let all take notice of it. Let the *kings of Judah* hear the word of the Lord (for, high as they are, he is above them), *and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem*, for, mean as they are, he takes notice of them, and of what they say and do on sabbath days. Observe,

I. How the sabbath is to be sanctified, and what is the law concerning it, v. 21, 22. 1. They must rest from their worldly employment on the sabbath day, must do no servile work. They must *bear no burden* into the city nor out of it, into their houses nor out of them; husbandmen's burdens of corn must not be carried in, nor manure carried out; nor must tradesmen's burdens of wares or merchandises be imported or exported. There must not a loaded horse, or cart, or waggon, be seen on the sabbath day either in the streets or in the roads; the porters must not ply on that day, nor must the servants be suffered to fetch in provisions or fuel. It is a day of rest, and must not be made a day of labour, unless in case of necessity. 2. They must apply themselves to that which is the proper work and business of the day: "*Hallow you the sabbath*, that is, consecrate it to the honour of God and spend it in his service and worship." It is in order to this that worldly business must be laid aside, that we may be entire for, and intent upon, that work, which requires and deserves the whole man. 3. They must herein be very circumspect: "*Take heed to yourselves*, watch against every thing that borders upon the profanation of the sabbath." Where God is jealous we must be cautious. "*Take heed to yourselves*, for it is at your peril if you rob God of that part of your time which he has reserved to himself." *Take heed to your souls* (so the word is); in order to the right sanctifying of sabbaths, we must look well to the frame of our spirits and have a watchful eye upon all the motions of the inward man. Let not the soul be burdened with the cares of this world on sabbath days, but let that be employed, even all that is within us, in the work of the day. And, 4. He refers them to the law, the statute in this case made and provided: "This is no new imposition upon you, but

is what *I commanded your fathers*; it is an ancient law; it was an article of the original contract; nay, it was a command to the patriarchs."

II. How the sabbath had been profaned (v. 23): "Your fathers were required to keep holy the sabbath day, *but they obeyed not*; they *hardened their necks* against this as well as other commands that were given them." This is mentioned to show that there needed a reformation in this matter, and that God had a just controversy with them for the long transgression of this law which they had been guilty of. They hardened their necks against this command, that they might not hear and receive instruction concerning other commands. Where sabbaths are neglected all religion sensibly goes to decay.

III. What blessings God had in store for them if they would make conscience of sabbath-sanctification. Though their fathers had been guilty of the profanation of the sabbath they should not only not smart for it, but their city and nation should recover its ancient glory, if they would keep sabbaths better, v. 24—26. Let them take care to *hallow the sabbath and do no work therein*; and then, 1. The court shall flourish. *Kings* in succession, or the many branches of the royal family at the same time, all as great as kings, with the other *princes that sit upon the thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David* (Ps. cxxii. 5), shall ride in great pomp *through the gates of Jerusalem*, some in chariots and some on horses, attended with a numerous retinue of the men of Judah. Note, The honour of the government is the joy of the kingdom; and the support of religion would contribute greatly to both. 2. The city shall flourish. Let there be a face of religion kept up in Jerusalem, by sabbath-sanctification, that it may answer to its title, *the holy city*, and then it *shall remain for ever, shall for ever be inhabited* (so the word may be rendered); it shall not be destroyed and dispeopled, as it is threatened to be. Whatever supports religion tends to establish the civil interests of a land. 3. The country shall flourish: *The cities of Judah and the land of Benjamin* shall be replenished with vast numbers of inhabitants, and those abounding in plenty and living in peace, which will appear by the multitude and value of their offerings, which they shall present to God. By this the flourishing of a country may be judged of, What does it do for the honour of God? Those that starve their religion either are poor or are in a fair way to be so. 4. The church shall flourish: *Meat-offerings, and incense, and sacrifices of praise*, shall be brought to the house of the Lord, for the maintenance of the service of that house and the servants that attend it. God's institutions shall be conscientiously observed; no sacrifice nor incense shall be offered to



idols, nor alienated from God, but every thing shall go in the right channel. They shall have both occasion and hearts to bring sacrifices of praise to God. This is made an instance of their prosperity. Then a people truly flourish when religion flourishes among them. And this is the effect of sabbath-sanctification; when that branch of religion is kept up other instances of it are kept up likewise; but, when that is lost, devotion is lost either in superstition or in profaneness. It is a true observation, which some have made, that the streams of all religion run either deep or shallow according as the banks of the sabbath are kept up or neglected.

IV. What judgments they must expect would come upon them if they persisted in the profanation of the sabbath (v. 27): "*If you will not hearken to me in this matter, to keep the gates shut on sabbath days, so that there may be no unnecessary entering in, or going out, on that day—if you will break through the enclosure of the divine law, and lay that day in common with other days—know that God will kindle a fire in the gates of your city,*" intimating that it shall be kindled by an enemy besieging the city and assaulting the gates, who shall take this course to force an entrance. Justly shall those gates be fired that are not used as they ought to be to shut out sin and to keep people in to an attendance on their duty. This fire shall devour even the palaces of Jerusalem, where the princes and nobles dwelt, who did not use their power and interest as they ought to have done to keep up the honour of God's sabbaths; but *it shall not be quenched* until it has laid the whole city in ruins. This was fulfilled by the army of the Chaldeans, *ch.* lii. 13. The profanation of the sabbath is a sin for which God has often contended with a people by fire.

## CHAP. XVIII.

In this chapter we have, I. A general declaration of God's ways in dealing with nations and kingdoms, that he can easily do what he will with them, as easily as the potter can with the clay (ver. 1–5), but that he certainly will do what is just and fair with them. If he threaten their ruin, yet upon their repentance he will return in mercy to them, and, when he is coming towards them in mercy, nothing but their sin will stop the progress of his favours, ver. 7–10. II. A particular demonstration of the folly of the men of Judah and Jerusalem in departing from their God to idols, and so bringing ruin upon themselves notwithstanding the fair warnings given them and God's kind intentions towards them, ver. 11–17. III. The prophet's complaint to God of the base ingratitude and unreasonable malice of his enemies, persecutors, and slanderers, and his prayers against them, ver. 18–23.

**T**HE word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, 2 Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. 3 Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold he wrought a work on the wheels. 4 And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it.

5 Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 6 O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel. 7 At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; 8 If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. 9 And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; 10 If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them.

The prophet is here sent to the potter's house (he knew where to find it), not to preach a sermon as before to the gates of Jerusalem, but to prepare a sermon, or rather to receive it ready prepared. Those needed not to study their sermons that had them, as he had this, by immediate inspiration. "*Go to the potter's house, and observe how he manages his work, and there I will cause thee, by silent whispers, to hear my words.*" There thou shalt receive a message, to be delivered to the people." Note, Those that would know God's mind must observe his appointments, and attend where they may hear his words. The prophet was never disobedient to the heavenly vision, and therefore went to the potter's house (v. 3) and took notice how he wrought his work upon the wheels, just as he pleased, with a great deal of ease, and in a little time. And (v. 4) when a lump of clay that he designed to form into one shape either proved too stiff, or had a stone in it, or some way or other came to be murred in his hand, he presently turned it into another shape; if it will not serve for a vessel of honour, it will serve for a vessel of dishonour, just as seems good to the potter. It is probable that Jeremiah knew well enough how the potter wrought his work, and how easily he threw it into what form he pleased; but he must go and observe it now, that, having the idea of it fresh in his mind, he might the more readily and distinctly apprehend that truth which God designed thereby to represent to him, and might the more intelligently explain it to the people. God used similitudes by his servants the prophets (Hos. xii. 10), and it was requisite that they should themselves understand the similitudes they used. Ministers will make a good use of their converse with the business and affairs of this life if they learn thereby to speak more plainly and familiarly

to people about the things of God, and to expound scripture comparisons. For they ought to make all their knowledge some way or other serviceable to their profession.

Now let us see what the message is which Jeremiah receives, and is entrusted with the delivery of, at the potter's house. While he looks carefully upon the potter's work, God darts into his mind these two great truths, which he must preach to *the house of Israel*.—

I. That God has both an incontestable authority and an irresistible ability to form and fashion kingdoms and nations as he pleases, so as to serve his own purposes: "*Cannot I do with you as this potter, saith the Lord?*" v. 6. Have not I as absolute a power over you in respect both of might and of right? Nay, God has a clearer title to a dominion over us than the potter has over the clay; for the potter only gives it its form, whereas we have both matter and form from God. *As the clay is in the potter's hand* to be moulded and shaped as he pleases, so *are you in my hand*. This intimates, 1. That God has an incontestable sovereignty over us, is not debtor to us, may dispose of us as he thinks fit, and is not accountable to us, and that it would be as absurd for us to dispute this as for the clay to quarrel with the potter. 2. That it is a very easy thing with God to make what use he pleases of us and what changes he pleases with us, and that we cannot resist him. One turn of the hand, one turn of the wheel, quite alters the shape of the clay, makes it a vessel, unmakes it, new-makes it. Thus are our times in God's hand, and not in our own, and it is in vain for us to strive with him. It is spoken here of nations; the most politic, the most potent, are what God is pleased to make them, and no other. See this explained by Job (*ch. xii. 23*), *He increaseth the nations and destroyeth them; he enlargeth the nations and straiteneth them again*. See Ps. cvii. 33, &c., and compare Job xxxiv. 29. *All nations before God are as the drop of the bucket*, soon wiped away, or *the small dust of the balance*, soon blown away (Isa. xl. 15), and therefore, no doubt, as easily managed as the clay by the potter. 3. That God will not be a loser by any in his glory, at long run, but, if he be not glorified by them, he will be glorified upon them. If the potter's vessel be marred for one use, it shall serve for another; those that will not be monuments of mercy shall be monuments of justice. *The Lord has made all things for himself, yea, even the wicked for the day of evil*, Prov. xvi. 4. God formed us out of the clay (Job xxxiii. 6), nay, and we are still as clay in his hands (Isa. lxiv. 8); and has not he the same power over us that the potter has over the clay? (Rom. ix. 21), and are not we bound to submit, as the clay to the potter's wisdom and will? Isa. xxix. 15, 16; xlv. 9.

II. That, in the exercise of this authority and ability, he always goes by fixed rules of equity and goodness. He dispenses favours indeed in a way of sovereignty, but never punishes by arbitrary power. *High is his right hand*, yet he rules not with a *high hand*, but, as it follows there, *Justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne*, Ps. lxxxix. 13, 14. God asserts his despotic power, and tells us what he might do, but at the same time assures us that he will act as a righteous and merciful Judge. 1. When God is coming against us in ways of judgment we may be sure that it is for our sins, which shall appear by this, that national repentance will stop the progress of the judgments (v. 7, 8): *If God speak concerning a nation to pluck up its fences that secure it, and so lay it open, its fruit-trees that adorn and enrich it, and so leave it desolate—to pull down its fortifications, that the enemy may have liberty to enter in, its habitations, that the inhabitants may be under a necessity of going out, and so destroy it* as either a vineyard or a city is destroyed—in this case, if *that nation* take the alarm, repent of their sins and reform their lives, turn every one from his evil way and return to God, God will graciously accept them, will not proceed in his controversy, will return in mercy to them, and; though he cannot change his mind, he will change his way, so that it may be said, *He repents him of the evil he said he would do to them*. Thus often in the time of the Judges, when the oppressed people were penitent people, still God raised them up saviours; and, when they turned to God, their affairs immediately took a new turn. It was Nineveh's case, and we wish it had oftener been Jerusalem's; see 2 Chron. vii. 14. It is an undoubted truth that a sincere conversion from the evil of sin will be an effectual prevention of the evil of punishment; and God can as easily raise up a penitent people from their ruins as the potter can make anew the vessel of clay when it was *marred in his hand*. 2. When God is coming towards us in ways of mercy, if any stop be given to the progress of that mercy, it is nothing but sin that gives it (v. 9, 10): *If God speak concerning a nation to build and to plant it, to advance and establish all the true interests of it, it is his husbandry and his building* (1 Cor. iii. 9), and, if he speak in favour of it, it is done, it is increased, it is enriched, it is enlarged, its trade flourishes, its government is settled in good hands, and all its affairs prosper and its enterprises succeed. But if this nation, which God is thus loading with benefits, *do evil in his sight and obey not his voice*,—if it lose its virtue, and become debauched and profane,—if religion grow into contempt, and vice get to be fashionable, and so be kept in countenance and reputation, and there be a general decay of serious godliness among them,—then God will turn his hand against



them, will pluck up what he was planting, and pull down what he was building (*ch. xlv. 4*); the good work that was in the doing shall stand still and be let fall, and what favours were further designed shall be withheld; and this is called his *repenting of the good wherewith he said he would benefit them*, as he changed his purpose concerning Eli's house (1 Sam. ii. 30) and hurried Israel back into the wilderness when he had brought them within sight of Canaan. Note, Sin is the great mischief-maker between God and a people; it forfeits the benefit of his promises and spoils the success of their prayers. It defeats his kind intentions concerning them (Hos. vii. 1) and baffles their pleasing expectations from him. It ruins their comforts, prolongs their grievances, brings them into straits, and retards their deliverances, Isa. lix. 1, 2.

11 Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good. 12 And they said, There is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart. 13 Therefore thus saith the LORD; Ask ye now among the heathen, who hath heard such things: the virgin of Israel hath done a very horrible thing. 14 Will a man leave the snow of Lebanon *which cometh* from the rock of the field? or shall the cold flowing waters that come from another place be forsaken? 15 Because my people hath forgotten me, they have burned incense to vanity, and they have caused them to stumble in their ways *from* the ancient paths, to walk in paths, *in* a way not cast up; 16 To make their land desolate, *and* a perpetual hissing; every one that passeth thereby shall be astonished, and wag his head. 17 I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy; I will show them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity.

These verses seem to be the application of the general truths laid down in the foregoing part of the chapter to the nation of the Jews and their present state.

I. God was now speaking concerning them to *pluck up*, and to *pull down*, and to *destroy*;

for it is that part of the rule of judgment that their case agrees with (v. 11): "*Go, and tell them*" (saith God), "*Behold, I frame evil against you and devise a device against you*." Providence in all its operations is plainly working towards your ruin. Look upon your conduct towards God, and you cannot but see that you deserve it; look upon his dealings with you, and you cannot but see that he designs it." He frames evil, as the potter frames the vessel, so as to answer the end.

II. He invites them by repentance and reformation to meet him in the way of his judgments and so to prevent his further proceedings against them: "*Return you now every one from his evil ways*, that so (according to the rule before laid down) God may turn from the evil he had purposed to do unto you, and that providence which seemed to be framed like a vessel on the wheel against you shall immediately be thrown into a new shape, and the issue shall be in favour of you." Note, The warnings of God's word, and the threatenings of his providence, should be improved by us as strong inducements to us to reform our lives, in which it is not enough to *turn from our evil ways*, but we must *make our ways and our doings good*, conformable to the rule, to the law.

III. He foresees their obstinacy, and their perverse refusal to comply with this invitation, though it tended so much to their own benefit (v. 12): *They said, "There is no hope.* If we must not be delivered unless we return from our evil ways, we may even despair of ever being delivered, for we are resolved that *we will walk after our own devices*. It is to no purpose for the prophets to say any more to us, to use any more arguments, or to press the matter any further; we will have our way, whatever it cost us; *we will do every one the imagination of his own evil heart*, and will not be under the restraint of the divine law." Note, That which ruins sinners is affecting to live as they list. They call it liberty to live at large; whereas for a man to be a slave to his lusts is the worst of slaveries. See how strangely some men's hearts are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin that they will not so much as promise amendment; nay, they set the judgments of God at defiance: "*We will go on with our own devices*, and let God go on with his; and we will venture the issue."

IV. He upbraids them with the monstrous folly of their obstinacy, and their hating to be reformed. Surely never were people guilty of such an absurdity, never any that pretended to reason acted so unreasonably (v. 13): *Ask you among the heathen*, even those that had not the benefit of divine revelation, no oracles, no prophets, as Judah and Jerusalem had, yet, even among them, *who hath heard such a thing?* The Ninevites, when thus warned, turned from their evil ways. Some of the worst of men, when they are told of their faults, especially when they

begin to smart for them, will at least promise reformation and say that they will endeavour to mend. But the virgin of Israel bids defiance to repentance, is resolved to go on forwardly, whatever conscience and Providence say to the contrary, and thus *has done a horrible thing*. She should have preserved herself pure and chaste for God, who had espoused her to himself; but she has alienated herself from him, and refuses to return to him. Note, It is *a horrible thing*, enough to make one tremble to think of it, that those who have made their condition sad by sinning should make it desperate by refusing to reform. Wilful impenitence is the grossest self-murder; and that is *a horrible thing*, which we should abhor the thought of.

V. He shows their folly in two things:—

1. In the nature of the sin itself that they were guilty of. They forsook God for idols, which was the most horrible thing that could be, for they put a most dangerous cheat upon themselves (v. 14, 15): *Will a thirsty traveller leave the snow*, which, being melted, runs down from the mountains of *Lebanon*, and, passing over the rock of the field, flows in clear, clean, crystal streams? Will he leave these, pass these by, and think to better himself with some dirty puddle-water? *Or shall the cold flowing waters that come from any other place be forsaken* in the heat of summer? No; when men are parched with heat and drought, and meet with cooling refreshing streams, they will make use of them, and not turn their backs upon them. The margin reads it, "*Will a man that is travelling the road leave my fields*, which are plain and level, *for a rock*, which is rough and hard, *or for the snow of Lebanon*, which, lying in great drifts, makes the road impassable? *Or shall the running waters be forsaken for the strange cold waters?*" No; in these things men know when they are well off, and will keep so; they will not leave a certainty for an uncertainty. But *my people have forgotten me* (v. 15), have quitted a fountain of living waters for broken cisterns. They have burnt incense to idols, that are as vain as vanity itself, that are not what they pretend to be nor can perform what is expected from them." They had not the common wit of travellers, but even their leaders caused them to err, and they were content to be misled. (1.) They left the ancient paths, which were appointed by the divine law, which had been walked in by all the saints, which were therefore the right way to their journey's end, a safe way, and, being well-tracked, were both easy to hit and easy to walk in. But, when they were advised to keep to the good old way, they positively said that they would not, ch. vi. 16. (2.) They chose by-paths; they walked in a way not cast up, not in the highway, the King's highway, in which they might travel safely, and which would certainly lead them to their right end, but in a dirty way, a rough way,

a way in which they could not but *stumble*; such was the way of idolatry (such is the way of all iniquity—it is a false way, it is a way full of stumbling-blocks) and yet this way they chose to walk in and lead others in.

2. In the mischievous consequences of it. Though the thing itself were bad, they might have had some excuse for it if they could have promised themselves any good out of it. But the direct tendency of it was to *make their land desolate*, and, consequently, themselves miserable (for so the inhabitants must needs be if their country be laid waste), and both themselves and their land *a perpetual hissing*. Those deserve to be hissed that have fair warning given them and will not take it. *Every one that passes by* their land shall make his remarks upon it, and *shall be astonished, and wag his head*, some wondering, others commiserating, others triumphing in the desolations of a country that had been *the glory of all lands*. They shall wag their heads in derision, upbraiding them with their folly in forsaking God and their duty, and so pulling this misery upon their own heads. Note, Those that revolt from God will justly be made the scorn of all about them, and, having reproached the Lord, will themselves be a reproach. *Their land being made desolate*, in pursuance of their destruction, it is threatened (v. 17), *I will scatter them as with an east wind*, which is fierce and violent; by it they shall be hurried to and fro *before the enemy*, and find no way open to escape. They shall not only flee before the enemy (that they might do and yet make an orderly retreat), but they shall be scattered, some one way and some another. That which completes their misery is, *I will show them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity*. Our calamities may be easily borne if God look towards us, and smile upon us, when we are under them, if he countenance us and show us favour; but if he turn the back upon us, if he show himself displeased, if he be deaf to our prayers and refuse us his help, if he forsake us, leave us to ourselves, and stand at a distance from us, we are quite undone. *If he hide his face, who then can behold him?* Job xxxiv. 29. Herein God would deal with them as they had dealt with him (ch. ii. 27), *They have turned their back unto me, and not their face*. It is a righteous thing with God to show himself strange to those in the day of their trouble who have shown themselves rude and undutiful to him in their prosperity. This will have its full accomplishment in that day when God will say to those who, though they have been professors of piety, were yet workers of iniquity, *Depart from me, I know you not, nay, I never knew you*.

18 Then said they, Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor



the word from the prophet. Come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words. 19 Give heed to me, O LORD, and hearken to the voice of them that contend with me. 20 Shall evil be recompensed for good? for they have digged a pit for my soul. Remember that I stood before thee to speak good for them, and to turn away thy wrath from them. 21 Therefore deliver up their children to the famine, and pour out their blood by the force of the sword; and let their wives be bereaved of their children, and be widows; and let their men be put to death; let their young men be slain by the sword in battle. 22 Let a cry be heard from their houses, when thou shalt bring a troop suddenly upon them: for they have digged a pit to take me, and hid snares for my feet. 23 Yet, LORD, thou knowest all their counsel against me to slay me: forgive not their iniquity, neither blot out their sin from thy sight, but let them be overthrown before thee; deal thus with them in the time of thine anger.

The prophet here, as sometimes before, brings in his own affairs, but very much for instruction to us.

I. See here what are the common methods of the persecutors. We may see this in Jeremiah's enemies, v. 18.

1. They laid their heads together to consult what they should do against him, both to be revenged on him for what he had said and to stop his mouth for the future: *They said, Come and let us devise devices against Jeremiah.* The enemies of God's people and ministers have been often very crafty themselves, and confederate with one another, to do them mischief. What they cannot act to the prejudice of religion separately they will try to do in concert. *The wicked plots against the just.* Caiaphas, and the chief priests and elders, did so against our blessed Saviour himself. The opposition which the gates of hell give to the kingdom of heaven is carried on with a great deal of cursed policy. God had said (v. 11), *I devise a device against you;* and now, as if they resolved to be quits with him and to outwit Infinite Wisdom itself, they resolve to *devise devices against* God's prophet, not only against his person, but against the word he delivered to them, which they thought by their subtle management to defeat. O the prodigious madness of those that hope to disannul God's counsel!

2. Herein they pretended a mighty zeal

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for the church, which, they suggested, was in danger if Jeremiah was tolerated to preach as he did: "*Come,*" say they, "let us silence and crush him, *for the law shall not perish from the priest; the law of truth is in their mouths* (Mal. ii. 6) and there we will seek it; the administration of ordinances according to the law is in their hands, and neither the one nor the other shall be wrested from them. *Counsel shall not perish from the wise; the administration of public affairs shall always be lodged with the privy-counsellors and ministers of state, to whom it belongs; nor shall the word perish from the prophets*"—they mean those of their own choosing, who prophesied to them smooth things, and flattered them with visions of peace. 'Two things they insinuated:—(1.) That Jeremiah could not be himself a true prophet, but was a pretender and a usurper, because he neither was commissioned by the priests nor concurred with the other prophets, whose authority therefore will be despised if he be suffered to go on. "If Jeremiah be regarded as an oracle, farewell the reputation of our priests, our wise men, and prophets; but that must be supported, which is reason enough why he must be suppressed." (2.) That the matter of his prophecies could not be from God, because it reflected sometimes upon the prophets and priests; he had charged them with being the ringleaders of all the mischief (ch. v. 31), and deceiving the people (ch. xiv. 14); he had foretold that their heart should perish, and be astonished (ch. iv. 9), that the wise men should be dismayed (ch. viii. 9, 10), that the priests and prophets should be intoxicated, ch. xiii. 13. Now this galled them more than any thing else. Presuming upon the promise of God's presence with their priests and prophets, they could not believe that he would ever leave them. The guides of the church must needs be infallible, and therefore he who foretold their being infatuated must be condemned as a false prophet. Thus, under colour of zeal for the church, have its best friends been run down.

3. They agreed to do all they could to blast his reputation: "*Come, let us smite him with the tongue,* put him into an ill name, fasten a bad character upon him, represent him to some as despicable and fit to be slighted, to others as dangerous and fit to be prosecuted, to all as odious and not fit to be tolerated." This was their device, *fortiùter calumniari, aliquid adhærebit*—to throw the vilest calumnies at him, in hopes that some would adhere to him, to dress him up in bear-skins, otherwise they could not bait him. Those who projected this, it is likely, were men of figure, whose tongue was no small slander, whose representations, though ever so false, would be credited both by princes and people, to make him obnoxious to the justice of the one and the fury of the other. The scourge of such tongues will give not

only smart lashes, but deep wounds; it is a great mercy therefore to be *hidden from it*, Job v. 21.

4. To set others an example, they resolved that they would not themselves regard any thing he said, though it appeared ever so weighty and ever so well confirmed as a message from God: *Let us not give heed to any of his words*; for, right or wrong, they will look upon them to be *his words*, and not the words of God. What good can be done with those who hear the word of God with a resolution not to heed it or believe it? Nay,

5. That they may effectually silence him, they resolve to be the death of him (v. 23): *All their counsel against me is to slay me. They hunt for the precious life*; and a precious life indeed it was that they hunted for. Long was this Jerusalem's wretched character, *Thou that killedst many of the prophets*, and wouldst have killed them all.

II. See here what is the common relief of the persecuted. This we may see in the course that Jeremiah took when he met with this hard usage. He immediately applied to his God by prayer, and so gave himself ease.

1. He referred himself and his cause to God's cognizance, v. 19. They would not regard a word he said, would not admit his complaints, nor take any notice of his grievances; but, *Lord* (says he), *do thou give heed to me*. It is matter of comfort to faithful ministers that, if men will not give heed to their preaching, yet God will give heed to their praying. He appeals to God as an impartial Judge, that will hear both sides, as every judge ought to do. *Do not only give heed to me, but hearken to the voice of those that contend with me*; hear what they have to say against me and for themselves, and then make it to appear that thou *sittest in the throne, judging right*. Hear the voice of my contenders, how noisy and clamorous they are, how false and malicious all they say is, and let them be *judged out of their own mouth; cause their own tongues to fall upon them*."

2. He complains of their base ingratitude to him (v. 20): "*Shall evil be recompensed for good, and shall it go unpunished? Wilt not thou recompense me good for that evil?*" 2 Sam. xvi. 12. To render good for good is human, evil for evil is brutish, good for evil is Christian, but evil for good is devilish; it is so very absurd and wicked a thing that we cannot think but God will avenge it. See how great the evil was that they did against him: *They have dug a pit for my soul*; they aimed to take away his life (no less would satisfy them), and that not in a generous way, by an open assault, against which he might have an opportunity of defending himself, but in a base, cowardly, clandestine way: *they dug pits for him*, which there was no fence against, Ps. cxix. 85. But see how great the good was which he had done for them: *Remember that I stood before thee to speak good for them*; he had been an inter-

cessor with God for them, had used his interest in heaven on their behalf, which was the greatest kindness they could expect from one of his character. *He is a prophet and he shall pray for thee*, Gen. xx. 7. Moses often did this for Israel, and yet they quarrelled with him, and sometimes *spoke of stoning him*. He did them this kindness when they were in imminent danger of destruction and most needed it. They had themselves provoked God's wrath against them, and it was ready to break in upon them, but he stood in the gap (as Moses, Ps. cvi. 23) and *turned away that wrath*. Now, (1.) This was very base in them. Call a man ungrateful and you can call him no worse. But it was not strange that those who had forgotten their God did not know their best friends. (2.) It was very grievous to him, as the like was to David. Ps. xxxv. 13; cix. 4, *For my love they are my adversaries*. Thus disingenuously do sinners deal with the great intercessor, crucifying him afresh, and speaking against him on earth, while his blood is speaking for them in heaven. See John x. 32. But, (3.) It was a comfort to the prophet that, when they were so spiteful against him, he had the testimony of his conscience for him that he had done his duty to them; and the same will be our rejoicing in such a day of evil. *The blood-thirsty hate the upright, but the just seek his soul*, Prov. xxix. 10.

3. He imprecates the judgments of God upon them, not from a revengeful disposition, but in a prophetic indignation against their horrid wickedness, v. 21—23. He prays, (1.) That their families might be starved for want of bread: "*Deliver up their children to the famine*, to the famine in the country for want of rain, and that in the city through the straitness of the siege. Thus let this iniquity of the fathers be visited upon the children." (2.) That they might be cut off by the sword of war, which, whatever it was in the enemy's hand, would be, in God's hand, a sword of justice: "*Pour them out* (so the word is) *by the hands of the sword*; let their blood be shed as profusely as water, that their wives may be left childless and widows, their husbands being taken away by death" (some think that the prophet refers to pestilence); let their young men, that are the strength of this generation and the hope of the next, be slain by the sword in battle. (3.) That the terrors and desolations of war might seize them suddenly and by surprise, that thus their punishment might answer to their sin (v. 22): "*Let a cry be heard from their houses*, loud shrieks, *when thou shalt bring a troop of the Chaldeans suddenly upon them*, to seize them and all they have, to make them prisoners and their estates a prey;" for thus they would have done by Jeremiah; they aimed to ruin him at once ere he was aware: "*They have dug a pit for me*, as for a wild beast, and have hid snares for me, as for some ravenous noxious fowl. Note,



Those that think to ensnare others will justly be themselves ensnared in an evil time.

(4.) That they might be dealt with according to the desert of this sin, which was without excuse: "*Forgive not their iniquity, neither blot out their sin from thy sight; that is, let them not escape the just punishment of it; let them lie under all the miseries of those whose sins are unpardoned.*"

(5.) That God's wrath against them might be their ruin: *Let them be overthrown before thee.* This intimates that justice was in pursuit of them, that they endeavoured to make their escape from it, but in vain; they shall be made to stumble in their flight, and being overthrown they will certainly be overtaken." And then, Lord, *in the time of thy anger*, do to them (he does not say what he would have done to them, but) do to them as thou thinkest fit, as thou usest to do with those whom thou art angry with—*deal thus with them.* Now this is not written for our imitation. Jeremiah was a prophet, and by the impulse of the spirit of prophecy, in the foresight of the ruin certainly coming upon his persecutors, might pray such prayers as we may not; and, if we think by this example to justify ourselves in such imprecations, we *know not what manner of spirit we are of*; our Master has taught us, by his precept and pattern, to *bless those that curse us and pray for those that despitefully use us.* Yet it is written for our instruction, and is of use to teach us, [1.] That those who have forfeited the benefit of the prayers of God's prophets for them may justly expect to have their prayers against them. [2.] That persecution is a sin that fills the measure of a people's iniquity very fast, and will bring as sure and sore a destruction upon them as any thing. [3.] Those who will not be won upon by the kindness of God and his prophets will certainly at length feel the just resentments of both.

## CHAP. XIX.

The same melancholy theme is the subject of this chapter that was of those foregoing—the approaching ruin of Judah and Jerusalem for their sins. This Jeremiah had often foretold; here he has particularly full orders to foretell it again. I. He must set their sins in order before them, as he had often done, especially their idolatry, ver. 4, 5. II. He must describe the particular judgments which were now coming upon them for these sins, ver. 6—9. III. He must do this in the valley of Tophet, with great solemnity, and for some particular reasons, ver. 2, 3. IV. He must summon a company of the elders together to be witnesses of this, ver. 1. V. He must confirm this, and endeavour to afflict his hearers with it, by a sign, which was the breaking of an earthen bottle, signifying that they should be dashed to pieces like a potter's vessel, ver. 10—13. VI. When he had done this in the valley of Tophet he ratified it in the court of the temple, ver. 14, 15. Thus were all likely means tried to awaken this stupid senseless people to repentance, that their ruin might be prevented; but all in vain.

**T**HUS saith the LORD, Go and get a potter's earthen bottle, and take of the ancients of the people, and of the ancients of the priests; 2 And go forth unto the valley of the son of Hinnom, which is by the entry of the east gate, and proclaim there the words that I shall tell thee, 3 And say,

Hear ye the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah, and inhabitants of Jerusalem; Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, the which whosoever heareth, his ears shall tingle. 4 Because they have forsaken me and have estranged this place, and have burnt incense in it unto other gods, whom neither they nor their fathers have known, nor the kings of Judah, and have filled this place with the blood of innocents; 5 They have built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt-offerings unto Baal, which I commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into my mind: 6 Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that this place shall no more be called Tophet, nor The valley of the son of Hinnom, but The valley of slaughter. 7 And I will make void the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place; and I will cause them to fall by the sword before their enemies, and by the hands of them that seek their lives: and their carcasses will I give to be meat for the fowls of the heaven, and for the beasts of the earth. 8 And I will make this city desolate, and a hissing; every one that passeth thereby shall be astonished and hiss, because of all the plagues thereof. 9 And I will cause them to eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and they shall eat every one the flesh of his friend in the siege and straitness, wherewith their enemies, and they that seek their lives, shall straiten them.

The corruption of man having made it necessary that *precept* should be *upon precept*, and *line upon line* (so unapt are we to receive, and so very apt to let slip, the things of God), the grace of God has provided that there shall be, accordingly, *precept upon precept*, and *line upon line*, that those who are irreclaimable may be inexcusable. For this reason the prophet is here sent with a message to the same purport with what he had often delivered, but with some circumstances that might make it the more taken notice of, a thing which ministers should study, for a little circumstance may sometimes be a great advantage, and those that would win souls must be wise.

I. He must take of the elders and chief

men, both in church and state, to be his auditors and witnesses to what he said—the *ancients of the people and the ancients of the priests*, the most eminent men both in the magistracy and in the ministry, that they might be *faithful witnesses to record*, as those Isa. viii. 2. It is strange that these great men should be at the beck of a poor prophet, and obey his summons to attend him out of the city, they knew not whither and they knew not why. But, though the generality of the elders were disaffected to him, yet it is likely that there were some few among them who looked upon him as a prophet of the Lord, and would pay this respect to the heavenly vision. Note, Persons of rank and figure have an opportunity of honouring God by a diligent attendance on the ministry of the word and other divine institutions; and they ought to think it an honour, and no disparagement to themselves, yea, though the circumstances be mean and despicable. It is certain that the greatest of men is less than the least of the ordinances of God.

II. He must go to the valley of the son of Hinnom, and deliver this message there; for the word of the Lord is not bound to any one place; as good a sermon may be preached in the valley of Tophet as in the gate of the temple. Christ preached on a mountain and out of a ship. This valley lay partly on the south side of Jerusalem, but the prophet's way to it was by the entry on the east gate—the sun-gate (v. 2), so some render it, and suppose it to look not towards the sun-rising, but the noon sun—the potter's gate, so some. This sermon must be preached in that place, in the valley of the son of Hinnom, 1. Because there they had been guilty of the vilest of their idolatries, the sacrificing of their children to Moloch, a horrid piece of impiety, which the sight of the place might serve to remind them of and upbraid them with. 2. Because there they should feel the sorest of their calamities; there the greatest slaughter should be made among them; and, it being the common sink of the city, let them look upon it and see what a miserable spectacle this magnificent city would be when it should be all like the valley of Tophet. God bids him go thither, and proclaim there the words that I shall tell thee, when thou comest thither; whereby it appears (as Mr. Gataker well observes) that God's messages were frequently not revealed to the prophets before the very instant of time wherein they were to deliver them.

III. He must give general notice of a general ruin now shortly coming upon Judah and Jerusalem, v. 3. He must, as those that make proclamation, begin with an Oyes: Hear you the word of the Lord, though it be a terrible word, for you may thank yourselves if it be so. Both rulers and ruled must attend to it, at their peril; the kings of Judah, the king and his sons, the king and his princes and privy-counsellors, must hear

the word of the King of kings, for, high as they are, he is above them. The *inhabitants of Jerusalem* also must hear what God has to say to them. Both princes and people have contributed to the national guilt and must concur in the national repentance, or they will both share in the national ruin. Let them all know that the Lord of hosts, who is therefore able to do what he threatens, though he is the God of Israel, nay, because he is so, will therefore punish them in the first place for their iniquities (Amos iii. 2): He will bring evil upon this place (upon Judah and Jerusalem) so surprising, and so dreadful, that whosoever hears it, his ears shall tingle; whosoever hears the prediction of it, hears the report and representation of it, it shall make such an impression of terror upon him that he shall still think he hears it sounding in his ears and shall not be able to get it out of his mind. The ruin of Eli's house is thus described (1 Sam. iii. 11), and of Jerusalem, 2 Kings xxi. 12.

IV. He must plainly tell them what their sins were for which God had this controversy with them, v. 4, 5. They are charged with apostasy from God (*They have forsaken me*) and abuse of the privileges of the visible church, with which they had been dignified—*They have estranged this place*. Jerusalem (the holy city), the temple (the holy house), which was designed for the honour of God and the support of his kingdom among men, they had alienated from those purposes, and (as some render the word) *they had strangely abused*. They had so polluted both with their wickedness that God had disowned both, and abandoned them to ruin. He charges them with an affection for and the adoration of false gods, such as *neither they nor their fathers have known*, such as never had recommended themselves to their belief and esteem by any acts of power or goodness done for them or their ancestors, as that God had abundantly done whom they forsook; yet they took them at a venture for their gods; nay, being fond of change and novelty, they liked them the better for their being upstarts, and new fashions in religion were as grateful to their fancies as in other things. They also stand charged with murder, wilful murder, from malice prepense: *They have filled this place with the blood of innocents*. It was Manasseh's sin (2 Kings xxiv. 4), *which the Lord would not pardon*. Nay, as if idolatry and murder, committed separately, were not bad enough and affront enough to God and man, they have put them together, have consolidated them into one complicated crime, that of burning their children in the fire to Baal (v. 5), which was the most insolent defiance to all the laws both of natural and revealed religion that ever mankind was guilty of; and by it they openly declared that they loved their new gods better than ever they loved the true God, though they were such



cruel task-masters that they required human sacrifices (inhuman I should call them), which the Lord Jehovah, whose all lives and souls are, never demanded from his worshippers; he never *spoke* of such a thing, nor *came it into his mind*. See *ch. vii. 31*.

V. He must endeavour to affect them with the greatness of the desolation that was coming upon them. He must tell them (as he had done before, *ch. vii. 32*) that this *valley of the son of Hinnom* shall acquire a new name, *the valley of slaughter* (*v. 6*), for (*v. 7*) multitudes shall *fall there by the sword*, when either they sally out upon the besiegers and are repulsed or attempt to make their escape and are seized: *They shall fall before their enemies*, who not only endeavour to make themselves masters of their houses and estates, but have such an implacable enmity to them that they *seek their lives*; they thirst after their blood, and, when they are dead, will not allow a cartel for the burying of the slain, but *their carcases shall be meat for the fowls of the heaven and beasts of the earth*. What a dismal place will the valley of Tophet be then! And as for those that remain within the city, and will not capitulate with the besiegers, they shall perish for want of food, when first they have eaten *the flesh of their sons and daughters*, and dearest friends, through the straitness wherewith their enemies shall straiten them, *v. 9*. This was threatened in the law as an instance of the extremity to which the judgments of God should reduce them (*Lev. xxvi. 29*, *Deut. xxviii. 53*) and was accomplished, *Lam. iv. 10*. And, *lastly*, the whole city shall be desolate, the houses laid in ashes, the inhabitants slain or taken prisoners; there shall be no resort to it, nor any thing in it but what looks rueful and horrid; so that *every one that passes by shall be astonished* (*v. 8*), as he had said before, *ch. xviii. 16*. That place which holiness had made *the joy of the whole earth* sin had made the reproach and shame of the whole earth.

VI. He must assure them that all their attempts to prevent and avoid this ruin, so long as they continued impenitent and unreformed, would be fruitless and vain (*v. 7*): *I will make void the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem* (of the princes and senators of Judah and Jerusalem) *in this place*, in the royal palace, which lay on the south side of the city, not far from the place where the prophet now stood. Note, There is no fleeing from God's justice but by fleeing to his mercy. Those that will not make good God's counsel, by humbling themselves under his mighty hand, shall find that God will make void their counsel and blast their projects, which they think ever so well concerted for their own preservation. There is *no counsel or strength against the Lord*.

10 Then shalt thou break the bottle in the sight of the men that go with thee, 11 And shalt say unto them,

Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Even so will I break this people and this city, as *one breaketh a potter's vessel*, that cannot be made whole again: and they shall bury *them* in Tophet, till *there be no place to bury*. 12 Thus will I do unto this place, saith the LORD, and to the inhabitants thereof, and *even* make this city as Tophet: 13 And the houses of Jerusalem, and the houses of the kings of Judah, shall be defiled as the place of Tophet, because of all the houses upon whose roofs they have burnt incense unto all the host of heaven, and have poured out drink-offerings unto other gods. 14 Then came Jeremiah from Tophet, whither the LORD had sent him to prophesy; and he stood in the court of the LORD's house; and said to all the people, 15 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring upon this city and upon all her towns all the evil that I have pronounced against it, because they have hardened their necks, that they might not hear my words.

The message of wrath delivered in the foregoing verses is here enforced, that it might gain credit, two ways:—

I. By a visible sign. The prophet was to take along with him an *earthen bottle* (*v. 1*), and, when he had delivered his message, he was to *break the bottle* to pieces (*v. 10*), and the same that were auditors of the sermon must be spectators of the sign. He had compared this people, in the chapter before, to the potter's clay, which is easily marred in the making. But some might say, "It is past that with us; we have been made and hardened long since." "And what though you be," says he, "the potter's vessel is as soon broken in the hand of any man as the vessel while it is soft clay is marred in the potter's hand, and its case is, in this respect, much worse, that the vessel while it is soft clay, though it be marred, may be moulded again, but, after it is hardened, when it is broken it can never be pieced again." Perhaps what they see will affect them more than what they only hear talk of; that is the intention of sacramental signs, and teaching by symbols was anciently used. In the explication of this sign he must inculcate what he had before said, with a further reference to the place where this was done, in the valley of Tophet. 1. As the bottle was easily, irresistibly, and irrecoverably broken, so shall *Judah and Jerusalem* be broken by the Chaldean army, *v. 11*. They depended much upon the firmness of their constitution, and the fixedness

of their courage, which they thought hardened them like a vessel of brass; but the prophet shows that all that did but harden them like a vessel of earth, which, though hard, is brittle and sooner broken than that which is not so hard. Though they were made vessels of honour, still they were vessels of earth, and so they shall be made to know if they dishonour God and themselves, and serve not the purposes for which they were made. It is God himself, who made them, that resolves to unmake them: *I will break this people and this city*, dash them in pieces like a *potter's vessel*; the doom of the heathen (Ps. ii. 9, Rev. ii. 27), but now Jerusalem's doom, Isa. xxx. 14. *A potter's vessel*, when once broken, cannot be made whole again, cannot be cured, so the word is. The ruin of Jerusalem shall be an utter ruin; no hand can repair it but his that broke it; and if they return to him, though he has torn, he will heal. 2. This was done in Tophet, to signify two things:—(1.) That Tophet should be the receptacle of the slain: *They shall bury in Tophet, for want of room to bury elsewhere* (so some read it), and, if they had had conveniences any where else, they would not have buried there, where all the filth of the city was carried. Or, as we read it, *They shall bury in Tophet till there be no place to bury any more there*; they shall jostle for room to lay their dead, and a very little room will then serve those who, while they lived, *laid house to house and field to field*. Those that would be placed *alone in the midst of the earth* while they were above ground, and obliged all about them to keep their distance, must lie with the multitude when they are underground, for there are innumerable before them. (2.) That Tophet should be a resemblance of the whole city (v. 12): *I will make this city as Tophet*. As they had filled the valley of Tophet with the slain which they sacrificed to their idols, so God will fill the whole city with the slain that shall fall as sacrifices to the justice of God. We read (2 Kings xxiii. 10) of Josiah's defiling Tophet, because it had been abused to idolatry, which he did (as should seem, v. 14) by *filling it with the bones of men*; and, whatever it was before, thenceforward it was looked upon as a detestable place. Dead carcases, and other filth of the city, were carried thither, and a fire was continually kept there for the burning of it. This was the posture of that valley when Jeremiah was sent thither to prophesy; and so execrable a place was it looked upon to be that, in the language of our Saviour's time, hell was called, in allusion to it, *Gehenna, the valley of Hinnon*. "Now" (says God) "since that blessed reformation, when Tophet was defiled, did not proceed as it ought to have done, nor prove a thorough reformation, but though the idols in Tophet were abolished and made odious those in Jerusalem remained, therefore will I do with the

city as Josiah did by Tophet, fill it with the bodies of men, and make it a heap of rubbish." Even *the houses of Jerusalem*, and those of the kings of Judah, the royal palaces not excepted, *shall be defiled as the place of Tophet* (v. 13), and for the same reason, because of the idolatries that have been committed there; since they will not defile them by a reformation, God will defile them by a destruction, *because upon the roofs of their houses they have burnt incense unto the host of heaven*. The flat roofs of their houses were sometimes used by devout people as convenient places for prayer (Acts x. 9), and by idolaters they were used as high places, on which they sacrificed to strange gods, especially to the *host of heaven*, the sun, moon, and stars, that there they might be so much nearer to them and have a clearer and fuller view of them. We read of those that *worshipped the host of heaven upon the house-tops* (Zeph. i. 5), and of *altars on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz*, 2 Kings xxiii. 12. This sin upon the house-tops brought a curse into the house, which consumed it, and made it a dunghill like Tophet.

II. By a solemn recognition and ratification of what he had said *in the court of the Lord's house*, v. 14, 15. The prophet returned from Tophet to the temple, which stood upon the hill over that valley, and there confirmed, and probably repeated, what he had said in the valley of Tophet, for the benefit of those who had not heard it; what he had said he would stand to. Here, as often before, he both assures them of judgments coming upon them and assigns the cause of them, which was their sin. Both these are here put together in a little compass, with a reference to all that had gone before. 1. The accomplishment of the prophecies is here the judgment threatened. The people flattered themselves with a conceit that God would be better than his word, that the threatening was but to frighten them and keep them in awe a little; but the prophet tells them that they deceive themselves if they think so: *For thus saith the Lord of hosts*, who is able to make his words good, *I will bring upon this city, and upon all her towns*, all the smaller cities that belong to Jerusalem the metropolis, *all the evil that I have pronounced against it*. Note, Whatever men may think to the contrary, the executions of Providence will fully answer the predictions of the word, and God will appear as terrible against sin and sinners as the scripture makes him; nor shall the unbelief of men make either his promises or his threatenings of no effect or of less effect than they were thought to be of. 2. The contempt of the prophecies is here the sin charged upon them, as the procuring cause of this judgment. It is *because they have hardened their necks*, and would not bow and bend them to the yoke of God's commands, would not *hear my words*, that is, would not heed them and yield obedience



to them. Note, The obstinacy of sinners in their sinful ways is altogether their own fault; if their necks are hardened, it is their own act and deed, they have hardened them; if they are deaf to the word of God, it is because they have stopped their own ears. We have need therefore to pray that God, by his grace, would deliver us *from hardness of heart and contempt of his word and commandments.*

## CHAP. XX.

Such plain dealing as Jeremiah used in the foregoing chapter, one might easily foresee, if it did not convince and humble men, would provoke and exasperate them; and so it did; for here we find, I. Jeremiah persecuted by Pashur for preaching that sermon, ver. 1, 2. II. Pashur threatened for so doing, and the word which Jeremiah had preached confirmed, ver. 3—6. III. Jeremiah complaining to God concerning it, and the other instances of hard measure that he had since he began to be a prophet, and the grievous temptations he had struggled with (ver. 7—10), encouraging himself in God, lodging his appeal with him, not doubting but that he shall yet praise him, by which it appears that he had much grace (ver. 11—13), and yet peevishly cursing the day of his birth (ver. 14—18), by which it appears that he had sad remainders of corruption in him too, and was a man subject to like passions as we are.

**N**OW Pashur the son of Immer the priest, who *was* also chief governor in the house of the LORD, heard that Jeremiah prophesied these things. 2 Then Pashur smote Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks that *were* in the high gate of Benjamin, which *was* by the house of the LORD. 3 And it came to pass on the morrow, that Pashur brought forth Jeremiah out of the stocks. Then said Jeremiah unto him, The LORD hath not called thy name Pashur, but Magor-missabib. 4 For thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will make thee a terror to thyself, and to all thy friends: and they shall fall by the sword of their enemies, and thine eyes shall behold it: and I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall carry them captive into Babylon, and shall slay them with the sword. 5 Moreover I will deliver all the strength of this city, and all the labours thereof, and all the precious things thereof, and all the treasures of the kings of Judah will I give into the hand of their enemies, which shall spoil them, and take them, and carry them to Babylon. 6 And thou, Pashur, and all that dwell in thine house shall go into captivity: and thou shalt come to Babylon, and there thou shalt die, and shalt be buried there, thou, and all thy friends, to whom thou hast prophesied lies.

Here is, I. Pashur's unjust displeasure against Jeremiah, and the fruits of that dis-

pleasure, v. 1, 2. This Pashur was a priest, and therefore, one would think, should have protected Jeremiah, who was of his own order, a priest too, and the more because he was a prophet of the Lord, whose interests the priests, his ministers, ought to consult. But this priest was a persecutor of him whom he should have patronized. He was *the son of Immer*; that is, he was of the sixteenth course of the priests, of which Immer, when these courses were first settled by David, was father (1 Chron. xxiv. 14), as Zechariah was of the order of Abiah, Luke i. 5. Thus this Pashur is distinguished from another of the same name mentioned ch. xxi. 1, who was of the fifth course. This Pashur was *chief governor in the temple*; perhaps he was only so *pro tempore*—for a short period, the course he was head of being now in waiting, or he was suffragan to the high priest, or perhaps captain of the temple or of the guards about it. Acts iv. 1. This was Jeremiah's great enemy. The greatest malignity to God's prophets was found among those that professed sanctity and concern for God and the church. We cannot suppose that Pashur was one of those ancients of the priests that went with Jeremiah to the valley of Tophet to hear him prophesy, unless it were with a malicious design to take advantage against him; but, when he came into the courts of the Lord's house, it is probable that he was himself a witness of what he said, and so it may be read (v. 1), *He heard Jeremiah prophesying these things.* As we read it, the information was brought to him by others, whose examinations he took: *He heard that Jeremiah prophesied these things,* and could not bear it, especially that he should dare to preach in the courts of the Lord's house, where he was *chief governor*, without his leave. When power in the church is abused, it is the most dangerous power that can be employed against it. Being incensed at Jeremiah, 1. He *smote* him, struck him with his hand or staff of authority. Perhaps it was a blow intended only to disgrace him, like that which the high priest ordered to be given to Paul (Acts xxiii. 2), he struck him on the mouth, and bade him hold his prating. Or perhaps he gave him many blows intended to hurt him; he beat him severely, as a malefactor. It is charged upon the husbandmen (Matt. xxi. 35) that they beat the servants. The method of proceeding here was illegal; the high priest, and the rest of the priests, ought to have been consulted, Jeremiah's credentials examined, and the matter enquired into, whether he had an authority to say what he said. But these rules of justice are set aside and despised, as mere formalities; right or wrong, Jeremiah must be run down. The enemies of piety would never suffer themselves to be bound by the laws of equity. 2. He *put him in the stocks.* Some make it only a place of confinement; he imprisoned him. It rather

seems to be an instrument of closer restraint, and intended to put him both to pain and shame. Some think it was a pillory for his neck and arms; others (as we) a pair of stocks for his legs: whatever engine it was, he continued in it all night, and in a public place too, *in the high gate of Benjamin, which was in, or by, the house of the Lord*, probably a gate through which they passed between the city and the temple. Pashur intended thus to chastise him, that he might deter him from prophesying; and thus to expose him to contempt and render him odious, that he might not be regarded if he did prophesy. Thus have the best men met with the worst treatment from this ungracious ungrateful world; and the greatest blessings of their age have been counted as the *off-scouring of all things*. Would it not raise a pious indignation to see such a man as Pashur upon the bench and such a man as Jeremiah in the stocks? It is well that there is another life after this, when persons and things will appear with another face.

II. God's just displeasure against Pashur, and the tokens of it. *On the morrow Pashur gave Jeremiah his discharge, brought him out of the stocks* (v. 3); it is probable that he continued him there, in little-ease, as long as was usual to continue any in that punishment. And now Jeremiah has a message from God to him. We do not find that, when Pashur put Jeremiah in the stocks, the latter gave him any check for what he did; he appears to have quietly and silently submitted to the abuse; *when he suffered, he threatened not*. But, when he brought him out of the stocks, then God put a word into the prophet's mouth, which would awaken his conscience, if he had any. For, when the prophet of the Lord was bound, *the word of the Lord was not*. What can we think Pashur aimed at in smiting and abusing Jeremiah? Whatever it is, we shall see by what God says to him that he is disappointed.

1. Did he aim to establish himself, and make himself easy, by silencing one that told him of his faults and would be likely to lessen his reputation with the people? He shall not gain this point; for, (1.) Though the prophet should be silent, his own conscience shall fly in his face and make him always uneasy. To confirm this he shall have a name given him, *Magor-missabib—Terror round about, or Fear on every side*. God himself shall give him this name, whose calling him so will make him so. It seems to be a proverbial expression, bespeaking a man not only in distress but in despair, not only in danger on every side (that a man may be and yet by faith may be in no terror, as David, Ps. iii. 6, xxvii. 3), but in fear on every side, and that a man may be when there appears no danger. *The wicked flee when no man pursues, are in great fear where no fear is*. This shall be Pashur's case (v. 4): "*Behold, I will make thee a terror to thyself*; that is,

thou shalt be subject to continual frights, and thy own fancy and imagination shall create thee a constant uneasiness." Note, God can make the most daring sinner a terror to himself, and will find out a way to frighten those that frighten his people from doing their duty. And those that will not hear of their faults from God's prophets, that are reprovers in the gate, shall be made to hear of them from conscience, which is a reprover in their own bosoms that will not be daunted nor silenced. And miserable is the man that is thus made a terror to himself. Yet this is not all; some are very much a terror to themselves, but they conceal it and seem to others to be pleasant; but, "*I will make thee a terror to all thy friends*; thou shalt, upon all occasions, express thyself with so much horror and amazement that all thy friends shall be afraid of conversing with thee and shall choose to stand aloof from thy torment." Persons in deep melancholy and distraction are a terror to themselves and all about them, which is a good reason why we should be very thankful, so long as God continues to us the use of our reason and the peace of our consciences. (2.) His friends, whom he put a confidence in and perhaps studied to oblige in what he did against Jeremiah, shall all fail him. God does not presently strike him dead for what he did against Jeremiah, but lets him live miserably, like Cain in the *land of shaking*, in such a continual consternation that wherever he goes he shall be a monument of divine justice; and, when it is asked, "What makes this man in such a continual terror?" it shall be answered, "It is God's hand upon him for putting Jeremiah in the stocks." His friends, who should encourage him, shall all be cut off; they shall *fall by the sword of the enemy, and his eyes shall behold it*, which dreadful sight shall increase his terror. (3.) He shall find, in the issue, that his terror is not causeless, but that divine vengeance is waiting for him (v. 6); he and his family shall *go into captivity, even to Babylon*; he shall neither die before the evil comes, as Josiah, nor live to survive it, as some did, but he shall die a captive, and shall in effect be buried in his chains, he *and all his friends*. Thus far is the doom of Pashur. Let persecutors read it, and tremble; tremble to repentance before they be made to tremble to their ruin.

2. Did he aim to keep the people easy, to prevent the destruction that Jeremiah prophesied of, and by sinking his reputation to make his words fall to the ground? It is probable that he did; for it appears by v. 6 that he did himself set up for a prophet, and told the people that they should have peace. He *prophesied lies to them*; and because Jeremiah's prophecy contradicted his, and tended to awaken those whom he endeavoured to rock asleep in their sins, therefore he set himself against him. But could he gain his



point? No; Jeremiah stands to what he has said against Judah and Jerusalem, and God by his mouth repeats it. Men get nothing by silencing those who reprove and warn them, for the word will have its course; so it had here. (1.) The country shall be ruined (v. 4): *I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon*. It had long been God's own land, but he will now transfer his title to it to Nebuchadnezzar, he shall be master of the country and dispose of the inhabitants some to the sword and some to captivity, as he pleases, but none shall escape him. (2.) The city shall be ruined too, v. 5. The king of Babylon shall spoil that, and carry all that is valuable in it to Babylon. [1.] He shall seize their magazines and military stores (here called *the strength of this city*) and turn them against them. These they trusted to as their strength; but what stead could they stand them in when they had thrown themselves out of God's protection, and when he who was indeed their strength had departed from them? [2.] He shall carry off all their stock in trade, their wares and merchandises, here called *their labours*, because it was what they laboured about and got by their labour. [3.] He shall plunder their fine houses, and take away their rich furniture, here called their *precious things*, because they valued them and set their hearts so much upon them. Happy are those who have secured to themselves precious things in God's precious promises, which are out of the reach of soldiers. [4.] He shall rifle the exchequer, and take away the jewels of the crown and *all the treasures of the kings of Judah*. This was that instance of the calamity which was first of all threatened to Hezekiah long ago as his punishment for showing his treasures to the king of Babylon's ambassadors, Isa. xxxix. 6. The treasury, they thought, was their defence; but that betrayed them, and became an easy prey to the enemy.

7 O LORD, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived: thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed: I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me. 8 For since I spake, I cried out, I cried violence and spoil; because the word of the LORD was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily. 9 Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But *his word* was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay. 10 For I heard the defaming of many, fear on every side. Report, *say they*, and we will report it. All my familiars watched for my halting, *saying*, Per-

adventure he will be enticed, and we shall prevail against him, and we shall take our revenge on him. 11 But the LORD is with me as a mighty terrible one: therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail: they shall be greatly ashamed; for they shall not prosper: *their everlasting confusion* shall never be forgotten. 12 But, O LORD of hosts, that triest the righteous, and seest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I opened my cause. 13 Sing unto the LORD, praise ye the LORD: for he hath delivered the soul of the poor from the hand of evil doers.

Pashur's doom was to be a *terror to himself*; Jeremiah, even now, in this hour of temptation, is far from being so; and yet it cannot be denied but that he is here, through the infirmity of the flesh, strangely agitated within himself. Good men are but men at the best. God is not extreme to mark what they say and do amiss, and therefore we must not be so, but make the best of it. In these verses it appears that, upon occasion of the great indignation and injury that Pashur did to Jeremiah, there was a struggle in his breast between his graces and his corruptions. His discourse with himself and with his God, upon this occasion, was somewhat perplexed; let us try to methodize it.

I. Here is a sad representation of the wrong that was done him and the affronts that were put upon him; and this representation, no doubt, was according to truth, and deserves no blame, but was very justly and very fitly made to him that sent him, and no doubt would bear him out. He complains,

1. That he was ridiculed and laughed at; they made a jest of every thing he said and did; and this cannot but be a great grievance to an ingenuous mind (v. 7, 8): *I am in derision; I am mocked*. They played upon him, and made themselves and one another merry with him, as if he had been a fool, good for nothing but to make sport. Thus he was continually: *I was in derision daily*. Thus he was universally: *Every one mocks me*; the greatest so far forget their own gravity, and the meanest so far forget mine. Thus our Lord Jesus, on the cross, was reviled both by priests and people; and the revilings of each had their peculiar aggravation. And what was it that thus exposed him to contempt and scorn? It was nothing but his faithful and zealous discharge of the duty of his office, v. 8. They could find nothing for which to deride him but his preaching; it was the *word of the Lord* that was made a reproach. That for which they should have honoured and re-

spected him—that he was entrusted to deliver the word of the Lord to them was the very thing for which they reproached and reviled him. He never preached a sermon, but, though he kept as closely as possible to his instructions, they found something or other in it for which to banter and abuse him. Note, It is sad to think that, though divine revelation be one of the greatest blessings and honours that ever was bestowed upon the world, yet it has been turned very much to the reproach of the most zealous preachers and believers of it. Two things they derided him for:—(1.) The manner of his preaching: *Since he spoke, he cried out.* He had always been a lively affectionate preacher, and since he began to speak in God's name he always spoke as a man in earnest; he *cried aloud and did not spare*, spared neither himself nor those to whom he preached; and this was enough for those to laugh at who hated to be serious. It is common for those that are unaffected with, and disaffected to, the things of God themselves, to ridicule those that are much affected with them. Lively preachers are the scorn of careless unbelieving hearers. (2.) The matter of his preaching: He *cried violence and spoil.* He reproved them for the violence and spoil which they were guilty of towards one another; and he prophesied of the violence and spoil which should be brought upon them as the punishment of that sin; for the former they ridiculed him as over-precise, for the latter as over-credulous; in both he was provoking to them, and therefore they resolved to run him down. This was bad enough, yet he complains further.

2. That he was plotted against and his ruin contrived; he was not only ridiculed as a weak man, but reproached and misrepresented as a bad man and dangerous to the government. This he laments as his grievance, v. 10. Being laughed at, though it touches a man in point of honour, is yet a thing that may be easily laughed at again; for, as it has been well observed, it is no shame to be laughed at, but to deserve to be so. But there were those that acted a more spiteful part, and with more subtlety. (1.) They spoke ill of him behind his back, when he had no opportunity of clearing himself, and were industrious to spread false reports concerning him: *I heard, at second hand, the defaming of many, fear on every side* (of many *Magor-missabib*s, so some read it), of many such men as Pashur was, and who may therefore expect his doom. Or this was the matter of their defamation; they represented Jeremiah as a man that instilled fears and jealousies on every side into the minds of the people, and so made them uneasy under the government, and disposed them to a rebellion. Or he perceived them to be so malicious against him that he could not but be *afraid on every side*; wherever he was he had reason to fear informers; so that they made him almost a *Magor-missabib*. These words are found

in the original, *verbatim*, the same, Ps. xxxi. 13, *I have heard the slander or defaming of many, fear on every side.* Jeremiah, in his complaint, chooses to make use of the same words that David had made use of before him, that it might be a comfort to him to think that other good men had suffered similar abuses before him, and to teach us to make use of David's psalms with application to ourselves, as there is occasion. Whatever we have to say, we may thence take with us words. See how Jeremiah's enemies contrived the matter: *Report, say they, and we will report it.* They resolve to cast an odium upon him, and this is the method they take: "Let some very bad thing be said of him, which may render him obnoxious to the government, and, though it be ever so false, we will second it, and spread it, and add to it." (For the reproaches of good men lose nothing by the carriage.) "Do you that frame a story plausibly, or you that can pretend to some acquaintance with him, report it once, and we will all report it from you, in all companies that we come into. Do you say it, and we will swear it; do you set it a going, and we will follow it." And thus both are equally guilty, those that raise and those that propagate the false report. The receiver is as bad as the thief. (2.) They flattered him to his face, that they might get something from him on which to ground an accusation, as the spies that came to Christ feigning themselves to be just men, Luke xx. 20; xi. 53, 54. His familiars, that he conversed freely with and put a confidence in, *watched for his halting*, observed what he said, which they could by any strained *innuendo* put a bad construction upon, and carried it to his enemies. His case was very sad when those betrayed him whom he took to be his friends. They said among themselves, "If we accost him kindly, and insinuate ourselves into his acquaintance, peradventure he will be enticed to own that he is in confederacy with the enemy and a pensioner to the king of Babylon, or we shall wheedle him to speak some treasonable words; and then *we shall prevail against him, and take our revenge on him* for telling us of our faults and threatening us with the judgments of God." Note, Neither the innocence of the dove, no, nor the prudence of the serpent to help it, can secure men from unjust censure and false accusation.

II. Here is an account of the temptation he was in under this affliction; his *feet were almost gone*, as the psalmist's, Ps. lxxiii. 2. And this is that which is most to be dreaded in affliction, being driven by it to sin, Neh. vi. 13. 1. He was tempted to quarrel with God for making him a prophet. This he begins with (v. 7): *O Lord! thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived.* This, as we read it, sounds very harshly. God's servants have been always ready to own that he is a faithful Master and never cheated



them; and therefore this is the language of Jeremiah's folly and corruption. If, when God called him to be a prophet and told him he would *set him over the kingdoms* (ch. i. 10) and *make him a defended city*, he flattered himself with an expectation of having universal respect paid to him as a messenger from heaven, and living safe and easy, and afterwards it proved otherwise, he must not say that God had deceived him, but that he had deceived himself; for he knew how the prophets before him had been persecuted, and had no reason to expect better treatment. Nay, God had expressly told him that all the *princes, priests, and people of the land would fight against him* (ch. i. 18, 19), which he had forgotten, else he would not have laid the blame on God thus. Christ thus told his disciples what opposition they should meet with, *that they might not be offended*, John xvi. 1, 2. But the words may very well be read thus: *Thou hast persuaded me, and I was persuaded*; it is the same word that was used, Gen. ix. 27, margin, *God shall persuade Japhet*. And Prov. xxv. 15, *By much forbearance is a prince persuaded*. And Hos. ii. 14, *I will allure her*. And this agrees best with what follows: "*Thou wast stronger than I, didst over-persuade me with argument; nay, didst overpower me, by the influence of thy Spirit upon me, and thou hast prevailed*." Jeremiah was very backward to undertake the prophetic office; he pleaded that he was under age and unfit for the service; but God overruled his pleas, and told him that *he must go*, ch. i. 6, 7. "Now, Lord," says he, "since thou hast put this office upon me, why dost thou not stand by me in it? Had I thrust myself upon it, I might justly have been in derision; but why am I so when thou didst thrust me into it?" It was Jeremiah's infirmity to complain thus of God as putting a hardship upon him in calling him to be a prophet, which he would not have done had he considered the lasting honour thereby done him, sufficient to counterbalance the present contempt he was under. Note, As long as we see ourselves in the way of God and duty it is weakness and folly, when we meet with difficulties and discouragements in it, to wish we had never set out in it. 2. He was tempted to quit his work and give it over, partly because he himself met with so much hardship in it and partly because those to whom he was sent, instead of being edified and made better, were exasperated and made worse (v. 9): "*Then I said, Since by prophesying in the name of the Lord I gain nothing to him or myself but dishonour and disgrace, I will not make mention of him as my author for any thing I say, nor speak any more in his name*; since my enemies do all they can to silence me, I will even silence myself, and speak no more, for I may as well speak to the stones as to them." Note, 1.

is a strong temptation to poor ministers to resolve that they will preach no more when they see their preaching slighted and wholly ineffectual. But let people dread putting their ministers into this temptation. Let not their labour be in vain with us, lest we provoke them to say that they will take no more pains with us, and provoke God to say, *They shall take no more*. Yet let not ministers hearken to this temptation, but go on in their duty, notwithstanding their discouragements, for this is the more thank-worthy; and, *though Israel be not gathered, yet they shall be glorious*.

III. Here is an account of his faithful adherence to his work and cheerful dependence on his God notwithstanding.

1. He found the grace of God mighty in him to keep him to his business, notwithstanding the temptation he was in to throw it up: "*I said, in my haste, I will speak no more in his name*; what I have in my heart to deliver I will stifle and suppress. But I soon found it was *in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones*, which glowed inwardly, and must have vent; it was impossible to smother it; I was like a man in a burning fever, uneasy and in a continual agitation; while *I kept silence from good my heart was hot within me*, it was pain and grief to me, and I must speak, that I might be refreshed;" Ps. xxxix. 2, 3; Job xxxii. 20. *While I kept silence, my bones waxed old*, Ps. xxxii. 3. See the power of the spirit of prophecy in those that were actuated by it; and thus will a holy zeal for God even eat men up, and make them forget themselves. *I believed, therefore have I spoken*. Jeremiah was soon weary with forbearing to preach, and could not contain himself; nothing puts faithful ministers to pain so much as being silenced, nor to terror so much as silencing themselves. Their convictions will soon triumph over temptations of that kind; for *woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel*, whatever it cost me, 1 Cor. ix. 16. And it is really a mercy to have the word of God thus mighty in us to overpower our corruptions.

2. He was assured of God's presence with him, which would be sufficient to baffle all the attempts of his enemies against him (v. 11): "*They say, We shall prevail against him*; the day will undoubtedly be our own. But I am sure that *they shall not prevail, they shall not prosper*. I can safely set them all at defiance, for *the Lord is with me*, is on my side, to take my part against them (Rom. viii. 31), to protect me from all their malicious designs upon me. He is with me to support me and bear me up under the burden which now presses me down. He is with me to make the word I preach answer the end he designs, though not the end I desire. He is with me as a mighty terrible one, to strike a terror upon them, and so to overcome them." Note, Even that in God which is terrible is really comfortable to his

servants that trust in him, for it shall be turned against those that seek to terrify his people. God's being a mighty God bespeaks him a terrible God to all those that take up arms against him or any one that, like Jeremiah, was commissioned by him. How terrible will the wrath of God be to those that think to daunt all about them and will themselves be daunted by nothing! The most formidable enemies that act against us appear despicable when we see the Lord for us as a *mighty terrible one*, Neh. iv. 14. Jeremiah speaks now with a good assurance: "*If the Lord be with me, my persecutors shall stumble*, so that, when they pursue me, they shall not overtake me (Ps. xxvii. 2), and then *they shall be greatly ashamed of their impotent malice and fruitless attempts*. Nay, *their everlasting confusion and infamy shall never be forgotten*; they shall not forget it themselves, but it shall be to them a constant and lasting vexation, whenever they think of it; others shall not forget it, but it shall leave upon them an indelible reproach."

3. He appeals to God against them as a righteous Judge, and prays judgment upon his cause, v. 12. He looks upon God as the God that *tries the righteous*, takes cognizance of them, and of every cause that they are interested in. He does not judge in favour of them with partiality, but *tries them*, and finding that they have right on their side, and that their persecutors wrong them and are injurious to them, he gives sentence for them. He that tries the righteous tries the unrighteous too, and he is very well qualified to do both; for he *sees the reins and the heart*, he certainly knows men's thoughts and affections, their aims and intentions, and therefore can pass an unerring judgment on their words and actions. Now this is the God, (1.) To whom the prophet here refers himself, and in whose court he lodges his appeal: *Unto thee have I opened my cause*. Not but that God perfectly knew his cause, and all the merits of it, without his opening; but the cause we commit to God we must spread before him. He knows it, but he will know it from us, and allows us to be particular in the opening of it, not to affect him, but to affect ourselves. Note, It will be an ease to our spirits, when we are oppressed and burdened, to open our cause to God and pour out our complaints before him. (2.) By whom he expects to be righted: "*Let me see thy vengeance on them*, such vengeance as thou thinkest fit to take for their conviction and my vindication, the vengeance thou usest to take on persecutors." Note, Whatever injuries are done us, we must not study to avenge ourselves, but must leave it to that God to do it *to whom vengeance belongs*, and who hath said, *I will repay*.

4. He greatly rejoices and praises God, in a full confidence that God would appear for his deliverance, v. 13. So full is he of

the comfort of God's presence with him, the divine protection he is under, and the divine promise he has to depend upon, that in a transport of joy he stirs up himself and others to give God the glory of it: *Sing unto the Lord, praise you the Lord*. Here appears a great change with him since he began this discourse; the clouds are blown over, his complaints all silenced and turned into thanksgivings. He has now an entire confidence in that God whom (v. 7) he was distrusting; he stirs up himself to praise that name which (v. 9) he was resolving no more to make mention of. It was the lively exercise of faith that made this happy change, that turned his sighs into songs and his tremblings into triumphs. It is proper to express our hope in God by our praising him, and our praising God by our singing to him. That which is the matter of the praise is, *He hath delivered the soul of the poor from the hand of the evil-doers*; he means especially himself, his own poor soul. "He hath delivered me formerly when I was in distress, and now of late out of the hand of Pashur, and he will continue to deliver me, 2 Cor. i. 10. He will deliver my soul from the sin that I am in danger of falling into when I am thus persecuted. He hath delivered me from the hand of evil-doers, so that they have not gained their point, nor had their will." Note, Those that are faithful in well-doing need not fear those that are spiteful in evil-doing, for they have a God to trust to who has well-doers under the hand of his protection and evil-doers under the hand of his restraint.

14 Cursed *be* the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed. 15 Cursed *be* the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto thee; making him very glad. 16 And let that man be as the cities which the LORD overthrew, and repented not: and let him hear the cry in the morning, and the shouting at noon tide; 17 Because he slew me not from the womb; or that my mother might have been my grave, and her womb *to be* always great *with me*. 18 Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?

What is the meaning of this? Does there proceed out of the same mouth blessing and cursing? Could he that said so cheerfully (v. 13), *Sing unto the Lord, praise you the Lord*, say so passionately (v. 14), *Cursed be the day wherein I was born*? How shall we reconcile these? What we have in these verses the prophet records, I suppose, to his



own shame, as he had recorded that in the foregoing verses to God's glory. It seems to be a relation of the ferment he had been in while he was in the stocks, out of which by faith and hope he had recovered himself, rather than a new temptation which he afterwards fell into, and it should come in like that of David (Ps. xxxi. 22), *I said in my haste, I am cut off*: this is also implied, Ps. lxxvii. 7. When grace has got the victory it is good to remember the struggles of corruption, that we may be ashamed of ourselves and our own folly, may admire the goodness of God in not taking us at our word, and may be warned by it to double our guard upon our spirits another time. See here how strong the temptation was which the prophet, by divine assistance, got the victory over, and how far he yielded to it, that we may not despair if we through the weakness of the flesh be at any time thus tempted. Let us see here,

I. What the prophet's language was in this temptation. 1. He fastened a brand of infamy upon his birth-day, as Job did in a heat (*ch. iii. 1*): "*Cursed be the day wherein I was born*. It was an ill day to me (*v. 14*), because it was the beginning of sorrows, and an inlet to all this misery." It is a wish that he had never been born. Judas in hell has reason to wish so (*Matt. xxvi. 24*), but no man on earth has reason to wish so, because he knows not but he may yet become a vessel of mercy, much less has any good man reason to wish so. Whereas some keep their birth-day, at the return of the year, with gladness, he will look upon his birth-day as a melancholy day, and will solemnize it with sorrow, and will have it looked upon as an ominous day. 2. He wished ill to the messenger that brought his father the news of his birth, *v. 15*. It made his father very glad to hear that he had a child born (perhaps it was his first-born), especially that it was a man-child, for then, being of the family of the priests, he might live to have the honour of serving God's altar; and yet he is ready to curse the man that brought him the tidings, when perhaps the father to whom they were brought gave him a gratuity for it. Here Mr. Gataker well observes, "That parents are often much rejoiced at the birth of their children when, if they did but foresee what misery they are born to, they would rather lament over them than rejoice in them." He is very free and very fierce in the curses he pronounces upon the messenger of his birth (*v. 16*): "*Let him be as the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, which the Lord utterly overthrew, and repented not, did not in the least mitigate or alleviate their misery. Let him hear the cry of the invading besieging enemy in the morning, as soon as he is stirring; then let him take the alarm, and by noon let him hear their shouting for victory. And thus let him live in constant terror.*" 3. He is angry that the fate of the

Hebrews' children in Egypt was not his, that he was not *slain from the womb*, that his first breath was not his last, and that he was not strangled as soon as he came into the world, *v. 17*. He wishes the messenger of his birth had been better employed and had been his murderer; nay, that his mother of whom he was born had been, to her great misery, always with child of him, and so the womb in which he was conceived would have served, without more ado, as a grave for him to be buried in. Job intimates a near alliance and resemblance between the womb and the grave, *Job i. 21*. *Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither.* 4. He thinks his present calamities sufficient to justify these passionate wishes (*v. 18*): "*Wherefore came I forth out of the womb, where I lay hid, was not seen, was not hated, where I lay safely and knew no evil, to see all this labour and sorrow, nay to have my days consumed with shame, to be continually vexed and abused, to have my life not only spent in trouble, but wasted and worn away by trouble?*"

II. What use we may make of this. It is not recorded for our imitation, and yet we may learn good lessons from it. 1. See the vanity of human life and the vexation of spirit that attends it. If there were not another life after this, we should be tempted many a time to wish that we had never known this; for our few days here are full of trouble. 2. See the folly and absurdity of sinful passion, how unreasonably it talks when it is suffered to ramble. What nonsense is it to curse a day—to curse a messenger for the sake of his message! What a brutish barbarous thing for a child to wish his own mother had never been delivered or him! See *Isa. xlv. 10*. We can easily see the folly of it in others, and should take warning thence to suppress all such intemperate heats and passions in ourselves, to stifle them at first and not to suffer these evil spirits to speak. When the heart is hot, let the tongue be bridled, *Ps. xxxix. 1, 2*. 3. See the weakness even of good men, who are but men at the best. See how much those who think they stand are concerned to take heed lest they fall, and to pray daily, *Father in heaven, lead us not into temptation!*

## CHAP. XXI.

It is plain that the prophecies of this book are not placed here in the same order in which they were preached; for there are chapters after this which concern Jehonahs, Jehoiakim, and Jehonah, who all reigned before Zedekiah, in whose reign the prophecy of this chapter bears date. Here is, I. The message which Zedekiah sent to the prophet, to desire him to enquire of the Lord for them, *ver. 1, 2*. II. The answer which Jeremiah, in God's name, sent to that message, in which, 1. He foretels the certain and inevitable ruin of the city, and the fruitlessness of their attempts for its preservation, *ver. 3—7*. 2. He advises the people to make the best of bad, by going over to the king of Babylon, *ver. 8—10*. 3. He advises the king and his family to repent and reform (*ver. 11, 12*), and not to trust to the strength of their city and grow secure, *ver. 13, 14*.

THE word which came unto Jeremiah from the Lord, when king Zedekiah sent unto him Pashur the

son of Melchiah, and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest, saying, 2 Enquire, I pray thee, of the LORD for us; for Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon maketh war against us; if so be that the LORD will deal with us according to all his wondrous works, that he may go up from us. 3 Then said Jeremiah unto them, Thus shall ye say to Zedekiah: 4 Thus saith the LORD God of Israel; Behold, I will turn back the weapons of war that *are* in your hands, wherewith ye fight against the king of Babylon, and *against* the Chaldeans, which besiege you without the walls, and I will assemble them into the midst of this city. 5 And I myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm, even in anger, and in fury, and in great wrath. 6 And I will smite the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast: they shall die of a great pestilence. 7 And afterward, saith the LORD, I will deliver Zedekiah king of Judah, and his servants, and the people, and such as are left in this city from the pestilence, from the sword, and from the famine, into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of those that seek their life: and he shall smite them with the edge of the sword; he shall not spare them, neither have pity, nor have mercy.

Here is, I. A very humble decent message which king Zedekiah, when he was in distress, sent to Jeremiah the prophet. It is indeed charged upon this Zedekiah that he *humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet, speaking from the mouth of the Lord* (2 Chron. xxxvi. 12); he did not always humble himself as he did sometimes; he never humbled himself till necessity forced him to it; he humbled himself so far as to desire the prophet's assistance, but not so far as to take his advice, or to be ruled by him. Observe,

1. The distress which king Zedekiah was now in: *Nebuchadrezzar made war upon him*, not only invaded the land, but besieged the city, and had now actually invested it. Note, Those that put the evil day far from them will be the more terrified when it comes upon them; and those who before slighted God's ministers may then perhaps be glad to court an acquaintance with them.

2. The messengers he sent—*Pashur and*

*Zephaniah*, one belonging to the fifth course of the priests, the other to the twenty-fourth, 1 Chron. xxiv. 9, 18. It was well that he sent, and that he sent persons of rank; but it would have been better if he had desired a personal conference with the prophet, which no doubt he might easily have had if he would so far have humbled himself. Perhaps these priests were no better than the rest, and yet, when they were commanded by the king, they must carry a respectful message to the prophet, which was both a mortification to them and an honour to Jeremiah. He had rashly said (*ch. xx. 18*), *My days are consumed with shame*; and yet here we find that he lived to see better days than those were when he made that complaint; now he appears in reputation. Note, It is folly to say, when things are bad with us, "They will always be so." It is possible that those who are despised may come to be respected; and it is promised that those who *honour God he will honour*, and that those who have *afflicted his people shall bow to them*, Isa. lx. 14.

3. The message itself: *Enquire, I pray thee, of the Lord for us, v. 2*. Now that the Chaldean army had got into their borders, into their bowels, they were at length convinced that Jeremiah was a true prophet, though loth to own it and brought too late to it. Under this conviction they desire him to stand their friend with God, believing him to have that interest in heaven which none of their other prophets had, who had flattered them with hopes of peace. They now employ Jeremiah, (1.) To consult the mind of God for them: "*Enquire of the Lord for us*; ask him what course we shall take in our present strait, for the measures we have hitherto taken are all broken." Note, Those that will not take the direction of God's grace how to get clear of their sins would yet be glad of the directions of his providence how to get clear of their troubles. (2.) To seek the favour of God for them (so some read it): "*Entreat the Lord for us*; be an intercessor for us with God." Note, Those that slight the prayers of God's people and ministers when they are in prosperity may perhaps be glad of an interest in them when they come to be in distress. *Give us of your oil*. The benefit they promise themselves is, *It may be the Lord will deal with us now according to the wondrous works he wrought for our fathers*, that the enemy may raise the siege and *go up from us*. Observe, [1.] All their care is to get rid of their trouble, not to make their peace with God and be reconciled to him—"That our enemy may *go up from us*," not, "That our God may return to us." Thus Pharaoh (Exod. x. 17). *Entreat the Lord that he may take away this death*. [2.] All their hope is that God had done wondrous works formerly in the deliverance of Jerusalem when Sennacherib besieged it, at the prayer of Isaiah (so we



are told, 2 Chron. xxxii. 20, 21), and who can tell but he may destroy these besiegers (as he did those) at the prayer of Jeremiah? But they did not consider how different the character of Zedekiah and his people was from that of Hezekiah and his people: those were days of general reformation and piety, these of general corruption and apostasy. Jerusalem is now the reverse of what it was then. Note, It is folly to think that God should do for us while we hold fast our iniquity as he did for those that held fast their integrity.

II. A very startling cutting reply which God, by the prophet, sent to that message. If Jeremiah had been to have answered the message of himself we have reason to think that he would have returned a comfortable answer, in hope that their sending such a message was an indication of some good purposes in them, which he would be glad to make the best of, for he did not desire the woeful day. But God knows their hearts better than Jeremiah does, and sends them an answer which has scarcely one word of comfort in it. He sends it to them in the name of *the Lord God of Israel* (v. 3), to intimate to them that though God allowed himself to be called the *God of Israel*, and had done great things for Israel formerly, and had still great things in store for Israel, pursuant to his covenants with them, yet this should stand the present generation in no stead, who were Israelites in name only, and not in deed, any more than God's dealings with them should cut off his relation to Israel as their God. It is here foretold,

1. That God will render all their endeavours for their own security fruitless and ineffectual (v. 4): "I will be so far from teaching your hands to war, and putting an edge upon your swords, that I will *turn back the weapons of war that are in your hand*, when you sally out upon the besiegers to beat them off, so that they shall not give the stroke you design; nay, they shall recoil into your own faces, and be turned upon yourselves." Nothing can make for those who have God against them.

2. That the besiegers shall in a little time make themselves masters of Jerusalem, and of all its wealth and strength: *I will assemble those in the midst of this city* who are now surrounding it. Note, If that place which should have been a centre of devotion be made a centre of wickedness, it is not strange if God make it a rendezvous of destroyers.

3. That God himself will be their enemy; and then I know not who can befriend them, no, not Jeremiah himself (v. 5): "I will be so far from protecting you, as I have done formerly in a like case, that *I myself will fight against you*." Note, Those who rebel against God may justly expect that he will make war upon them, and that, (1.) With the power of a God who is irresistibly victo-

rious: *I will fight against you with an outstretched hand*, which will reach far, and *with a strong arm*, which will strike home and wound deeply. (2.) With the displeasure of a God who is indisputably righteous. It is not a correction in love, but an execution *in anger, in fury, and in great wrath*; it is upon a sentence sworn in wrath, against which there will lie no exception, and it will soon be found what a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God.

4. That those who, for their own safety, decline sallying out upon the besiegers, and so avoid their sword, shall yet not escape the sword of God's justice (v. 6): *I will smite those that abide in the city* (so it may be read), *both man and beast*, both the beasts that are for food and those that are for service in war, foot and horse; *they shall die of a great pestilence*, which shall rage within the walls, while the enemies are encamped about them. Though Jerusalem's gates and walls may for a time keep out the Chaldeans, they cannot keep out God's judgments. His arrows of pestilence can reach those that think themselves safe from other arrows.

5. That the king himself, and all the people that escape the sword, famine, and pestilence, shall fall into the hands of the Chaldeans, who shall cut them off in cold blood (v. 7): *They shall not spare them, nor have pity on them*. Let not those expect to find mercy with men who have forfeited God's compassions, and shut themselves out from his mercy. Thus had the decree gone forth; and then to what purpose was it for Jeremiah to enquire of the Lord for them?

8 And unto this people thou shalt say, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I set before you the way of life, and the way of death. 9 He that abideth in this city shall die by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth out, and falleth to the Chaldeans that besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be unto him for a prey. 10 For I have set my face against this city for evil, and not for good, saith the LORD: it shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire. 11 And touching the house of the king of Judah, say, Hear ye the word of the LORD; 12 O house of David, thus saith the LORD; Execute judgment in the morning, and deliver him that is spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor, lest my fury go out like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings. 13 Behold, I

am against thee, O inhabitant of the valley, and rock of the plain, saith the LORD; which say, Who shall come down against us? or who shall enter into our habitations? 14 But I will punish you according to the fruit of your doings, saith the LORD: and I will kindle a fire in the forest thereof, and it shall devour all things round about it.

By the civil message which the king sent to Jeremiah it appeared that both he and the people began to have a respect for him, which it would have been Jeremiah's policy to make some advantage of for himself; but the reply which God obliges him to make is enough to crush the little respect they begin to have for him, and to exasperate them against him more than ever. Not only the predictions in the foregoing verses, but the prescriptions in these, were provoking; for here,

I. He advises the people to surrender and desert to the Chaldeans, as the only means left them to save their lives, v. 8—10. This counsel was very displeasing to those who were flattered by their false prophets into a desperate resolution to hold out to the last extremity, trusting to the strength of their walls and the courage of their soldiery to keep out the enemy, or to their foreign aids to raise the siege. The prophet assures them, "*The city shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall not only plunder it, but burn it with fire, for God himself hath set his face against this city for evil and not for good, to lay it waste and not to protect it, for evil which shall have no good mixed with it, no mitigation or merciful allay; and therefore, if you would make the best of bad, you must beg quarter of the Chaldeans, and surrender prisoners of war.*" In vain did Rabshakeh persuade the Jews to do this while they had God for them (Isa. xxxvi. 16), but it was the best course they could take now that God was against them. Both the law and the prophets had often set before them life and death in another sense—life if they obey the voice of God, death if they persist in disobedience, Deut. xxx. 19. But they had slighted that life which would have made them truly happy, to upbraid them with which the prophet here uses the same expression (v. 8): *Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death*, which denotes not, as that, a fair proposal, but a melancholy dilemma, advising them of two evils to choose the less; and that less evil, a shameful and wretched captivity, is all the life now left for them to propose to themselves. *He that abides in the city*, and trusts to that to secure him, shall certainly die either by the sword without the walls or famine or pestilence within. But he that can so far bring down his spirit, and quit his

vain hopes, as to go out, and fall to the Chaldeans, his life shall be given him for a prey, he shall save his life, but with much difficulty and hazard, as a prey is taken from the mighty. It is an expression like that, *He shall be saved, yet so as by fire*. He shall escape but very narrowly, or he shall have such surprising joy and satisfaction in escaping with his life from such a universal destruction as shall equal theirs that divide the spoil. They thought to make a prey of the camp of the Chaldeans, as their ancestors did that of the Assyrians (Isa. xxxiii. 23), but they will be sadly disappointed; if by yielding at discretion they can but save their lives, that is all the prey they must promise themselves. Now one would think this advice from a prophet, in God's name, should have gained some credit with them and been universally followed; but, for aught that appears, there were few or none that took it; so wretchedly were their hearts hardened, to their destruction.

II. He advises the king and princes to reform, and make conscience of the duty of their place. Because it was the king that sent the message to him, in the reply there shall be a particular word for *the house of the king*, not to compliment or court them (that was no part of the prophet's business, no, not when they did him the honour to send to him), but to give them wholesome counsel (v. 11, 12): "*Execute judgment in the morning; do it carefully and diligently. Those magistrates that would fill up their place with duty had need rise betimes. Do it quickly, and do not delay to do justice upon appeals made to you, and tire out poor petitioners as you have done. Do not lie in your beds in a morning to sleep away the debauch of the night before, nor spend the morning in pampering the body (as those princes, Eccl. x. 16), but spend it in the despatch of business. You would be delivered out of the hand of those that distress you, and expect that therein God should do you justice; see then that you do justice to those that apply to you, and deliver them out of the hand of their oppressors, lest my fury go out like fire against you in a particular manner, and you fare worst who think to escape best, because of the evil of your doings.*" Now, 1. This intimates that it was their neglect to do their duty that brought all this desolation upon the people. It was the *evil of their doings* that kindled the fire of God's wrath. Thus plainly does he deal even with the *house of the king*; for those that would have the benefit of a prophet's prayers must thankfully take a prophet's reproofs. 2. This directs them to take the right method for a national reformation. The princes must begin, and set a good example, and then the people will be invited to reform. They must use their power for the punishment of wrong, and then the people will be obliged to reform. He reminds them that they are *the*



house of David, and therefore should tread in his steps, who executed judgment and justice to his people. 3. This gives them some encouragement to hope that there may yet be a lengthening of their tranquillity, Dan. iv. 27. If any thing will recover their state from the brink of ruin, this will.

III. He shows them the vanity of all their hopes so long as they continued unreformed, v. 13, 14. Jerusalem is an *inhabitant of the valley*, guarded with mountains on all sides, which were their natural fortifications, making it difficult for an army to approach them. It is a *rock of the plain*, which made it difficult for an enemy to undermine them. These advantages of their situation they trusted to more than to the power and promise of God; and, thinking their city by these means to be impregnable, they set the judgments of God at defiance, saying, "*Who shall come down against us?*" None of our neighbours dare make a descent upon us, or, if they do, *who shall enter into our habitations?*" They had some colour for this confidence; for it appears to have been the sense of all their neighbours that no enemy could force his way into Jerusalem, Lam. iv. 12. But those are least safe that are most secure. God soon shows the vanity of that challenge, *Who shall come down against us?* when he says (v. 13), *Behold, I am against thee.* They had indeed by their wickedness driven God out of their city when he would have tarried with them as a friend; but they could not by their bulwarks keep them out of their city when he came against them as an enemy. If God be for us, who can be against us? But, if he be against us, who can be for us, to stand us in any stead? Nay, he comes against them not as an enemy that may lawfully and with some hope of success be resisted, but as a judge that cannot be resisted; for he says (v. 14), *I will punish you*, by due course of law, *according to the fruit of your doings*, that is, according to the merit of them and the direct tendency of them. That shall be brought upon you which is the natural product of sin. Nay, he will not only come with the anger of an enemy and the justice of a judge, but with the force of a consuming fire, which has no compassion, as a judge sometimes has, nor spares any thing combustible that comes in its way. Jerusalem has become a forest, in which God will *kindle a fire* that shall consume all before it; for our God is himself *a consuming fire*; and *who is able to stand in his sight* when once he is angry?

## CHAP. XXII.

Upon occasion of the message sent in the foregoing chapter to the house of the king, we have here recorded some sermons which Jeremiah preached at court, in some preceding reigns, that it might appear they had had fair warning long before that fatal sentence was pronounced upon them, and were put in a way to prevent it. Here is, I. A message sent to the royal family, as it should seem in the reign of Jehoiakim, relating partly to Jehoiach, who was carried away captive into Egypt, and partly to Jehoiakim, who succeeded him and was now upon the throne. The king and princes are exhorted to execute judgment, and are assured that, if they did so, the royal family should flourish, but otherwise it

## XXII. Jeremiah preaches before Jehoiakim.

should be ruined, ver. 1-9. Jehoiach, called here Shallum, is mentioned, ver. 10-12. Jehoiakim is reproved and threatened, ver. 13-19. II. Another message sent them in the reign of Jehoiachin (Jahaz, Jeconiah) the son of Jehoiakim. He is charged with an obstinate refusal to hear, and is threatened with destruction, and it is foretold that in him Solomon's house should fall, ver. 20-30.

THUS saith the LORD; Go down to the house of the king of Judah, and speak there this word, 2 And say, Hear the word of the LORD, O king of Judah, that sittest upon the throne of David, thou, and thy servants, and thy people that enter in by these gates: 3 Thus saith the LORD; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place. 4 For if ye do this thing indeed, then shall there enter in by the gates of this house kings sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, he, and his servants, and his people. 5 But if ye will not hear these words, I swear by myself, saith the LORD, that this house shall become a desolation. 6 For thus saith the LORD unto the king's house of Judah; Thou art Gilead unto me, and the head of Lebanon: yet surely I will make thee a wilderness, and cities which are not inhabited. 7 And I will prepare destroyers against thee, every one with his weapons: and they shall cut down thy choice cedars, and cast them into the fire. 8 And many nations shall pass by this city, and they shall say every man to his neighbour, Wherefore hath the LORD done thus unto this great city? 9 Then they shall answer, Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD their God, and worshipped other gods, and served them.

Here we have,

I. Orders given to Jeremiah to go and preach before the king. In the foregoing chapter we are told that Zedekiah sent messengers to the prophet, but here the prophet is bidden to go, in his own proper person, to the house of the king, and demand his attention to the word of the King of kings (v. 2): *Hear the word of the Lord, O king of Judah!* Subjects must own that where the word of the king is there is power over them, but kings must own that where the word of the Lord is there is power over them.

The king of Judah is here spoken to as sitting upon the throne of David, who was a man after God's own heart, as holding his dignity and power by the covenant made with David; let him therefore conform to his example, that he may have the benefit of the promises made to him. With the king his servants are spoken to, because a good government depends upon a good ministry as well as a good king.

## II. Instructions given him what to preach.

1. He must tell them what was their duty, what was the good which the Lord their God required of them, *v. 3.* They must take care, (1.) That they do all the good they can with the power they have. They must do justice in defence of those that were injured, and must deliver the spoiled out of the hand of their oppressors. This was the duty of their place, *Ps. lxxxii. 3.* Herein they must be ministers of God for good. (2.) That they do no hurt with it, *no wrong, no violence.* That is the greatest wrong and violence which is done under colour of law and justice, and by those whose business it is to punish and protect from wrong and violence. They must do no wrong to the stranger, fatherless, and widow; for these God does in a particular manner patronise and take under his tuition, *Exod. xxii. 21, 22.*

2. He must assure them that the faithful discharge of their duty would advance and secure their prosperity, *v. 4.* There shall then be a succession of kings, an uninterrupted succession, upon the throne of David and of his line, these enjoying a perfect tranquillity, and living in great state and dignity, riding in chariots and on horses, as before, *ch. xvii. 25.* Note, the most effectual way to preserve the dignity of the government is to do the duty of it.

3. He must likewise assure them that the iniquity of their family, if they persisted in it, would be the ruin of their family, though it was a royal family (*v. 5*): *If you will not hear, will not obey, this house shall become a desolation,* the palace of the kings of Judah shall fare no better than other habitations in Jerusalem. Sin has often been the ruin of royal palaces, though ever so stately, ever so strong. This sentence is ratified by an oath: *I swear by myself* (and God can swear by no greater, *Heb. vi. 13*) that this house shall be laid in ruins. Note, Sin will be the ruin of the houses of princes as well as of mean men.

4. He must show how fatal their wickedness would be to their kingdom as well as to themselves, to Jerusalem especially, the royal city, *v. 6—9.* (1.) It is confessed that Judah and Jerusalem had been valuable in God's eyes and considerable in their own: *Thou art Gilead unto me and the head of Lebanon.* Their lot was cast in a place that was rich and pleasant as Gilead; Zion was a stronghold, as stately as Lebanon: this they trusted to as their security. But, (2.) This shall not protect them; the country that is now fruitful

as Gilead shall be made a wilderness. The cities that are now strong as Lebanon, shall be cities not inhabited; and, when the country is laid waste, the cities must be dispeopled. See how easily God's judgments can ruin a nation, and how certainly sin will do it. When this desolating work is to be done, [1.] There shall be those that shall do it effectually (*v. 7*): *I will prepare destroyers against thee; I will sanctify them*" (so the word is); "I will appoint them to this service and use them in it." Note, When destruction is designed destroyers are prepared, and perhaps are in the preparing, and things are working towards the designed destruction, and are getting ready for it, long before. And who can contend with destroyers of God's preparing? They shall destroy cities as easily as men fell trees in a forest: *They shall cut down thy choice cedars;* and yet, when they are down, shall value them no more than thorns and briars; they shall cast them into the fire, for their choicest cedars have become rotten ones and good for nothing else. [2.] There shall be those who shall be ready to justify God in the doing of it (*v. 8, 9*); persons of many nations, when they pass by the ruins of this city in their travels, will ask, "Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto this city?" How came so strong a city to be overpowered? so rich a city to be impoverished? so populous a city to be depopulated? so holy a city to be profaned? and a city that had been so dear to God to be abandoned by him?" The reason is so obvious that it shall be ready in every man's mouth. Ask those that go by the way, *Job xxi. 29.* Ask the next man you meet, and he will tell you it was because they changed their gods, which other nations never used to do. They forsook the covenant of Jehovah their own God, revolted from their allegiance to him and from the duty which their covenant with him bound them to, and they worshipped other gods and served them, in contempt of him; and therefore he gave them up to this destruction. Note, God never casts any off until they first cast him off. "Go," says God to the prophet, "and preach this to the royal family."

10 Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him: but weep sore for him that goeth away: for he shall return no more, nor see his native country. 11 For thus saith the Lord touching Shallum the son of Josiah king of Judah, which reigned instead of Josiah his father, which went forth out of this place; He shall not return thither any more: 12 But he shall die in the place whither they have led him captive, and shall see this land no more. 13 Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteous-



ness, and his chambers by wrong; *that* useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work; 14 That saith, I will build me a wide house and large chambers, and cutteth him out windows; and *it is* ceiled with cedar, and painted with vermilion. 15 Shalt thou reign, because thou closest *thyself* in cedar? did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice, *and then it was* well with him? 16 He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then *it was* well *with him*: was not this to know me? saith the LORD. 17 But thine eyes and thine heart *are* not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do *it*. 18 Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah; They shall not lament for him, *saying*, Ah my brother! or, Ah sister! they shall not lament for him, *saying*, Ah lord! or, Ah his glory! 19 He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem.

Kings, though they are gods to us, are men to God, and shall *die like men*; so it appears in these verses, where we have a sentence of death passed upon two kings who reigned successively in Jerusalem, two brothers, and both the ungracious sons of a very pious father.

I. Here is the doom of Shallum; who doubtless is the same with Jehoahaz, for he is that son of Josiah king of Judah who reigned *in the stead of Josiah his father* (v. 11), which Jehoahaz did by the act of the people, who made him king though he was not the eldest son, 2 Kings xxiii. 30; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 1. Among the sons of Josiah (1 Chron. iii. 15) there is one Shallum mentioned, and not Jehoahaz. Perhaps the people preferred him before his elder brother because they thought him a more active daring young man, and fitter to rule; but God soon showed them the folly of their injustice, and that it could not prosper, for within three months the king of Egypt came upon him, deposed him, and carried him away prisoner into Egypt, as God had threatened, Deut. xxviii. 68. It does not appear that any of the people were taken into captivity with him. We have the story 2 Kings xxiii. 34; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 4. Now here, 1. The people are directed to lament him rather than his father Josiah: "*Weep not for the dead, weep not any more for Josiah.*" Jeremiah had been himself a true

mourner for him, and had stirred up the people to mourn for him (2 Chron. xxxv. 25): yet now he will have them go out of mourning for him, though it was but three months after his death, and to turn their tears into another channel. They must weep sorely for Jehoahaz, who had gone into Egypt; not that there was any great loss of him to the public, as there was of his father, but that his case was much more deplorable. Josiah went to the grave in peace and honour, was prevented from seeing the evil to come in this world and removed to see the good to come in the other world; and therefore, *Weep not for him*, but for his unhappy son, who is likely to live and die in disgrace and misery, a wretched captive. Note, Dying saints may be justly envied, while living sinners are justly pitied. And so dismal perhaps the prospect of the times may be that tears even for a Josiah, even for a Jesus, must be restrained, that they may be reserved for *ourselves and for our children*, Luke xxiii. 28. 2. The reason given is because he shall never return out of captivity, as he and his people expected, but shall die there. They were loth to believe this, therefore it is repeated here again and again, He shall *return no more*, v. 10. He shall never have the pleasure of seeing *his native country*, but shall have the continual grief of hearing of the desolations of it. He has gone *forth out of this place*, and shall *never return*, v. 11. *He shall die in the place whither they have led him captive*, v. 12. This came of his forsaking the good example of his father, and usurping the right of his elder brother. In Ezekiel's lamentation for the princes of Israel this Jehoahaz is represented as a young lion, that soon learned to *catch the prey*, but was taken, and brought in chains to Egypt, and was long expected to return, but in vain. See Ezek. xix. 3—5.

II. Here is the doom of Jehoiakim, who succeeded him. Whether he had any better right to the crown than Shallum we know not; for, though he was older than his predecessor, there seems to be another son of Josiah, older than he, called *Johanan*, 1 Chron. iii. 15. But this we know he ruled no better, and fared no better at last. Here we have,

1. His sins faithfully reprov'd. It is not fit for a private person to say to a king, *Thou art wicked*; but a prophet, who has a message from God, betrays his trust if he does not deliver it, be it ever so displeasing, even to kings themselves. Jehoiakim is not here charged with idolatry, and probably he had not yet put Urijah the prophet to death (as we find afterwards he did, *ch.* xxvi. 22, 23), for then he would have been told of it here; but the crimes for which he is here reprov'd are, (1.) Pride, and affectation of pomp and splendour; as if all the business of a king were to look great, and to do good were to be the least of his care. He must build him-

self a stately palace, a *wide house*, and *large chambers*, v. 14. He must have *windows cut out* after the newest fashion, perhaps like sash-windows with us. The rooms must be *ceiled with cedar*, the richest sort of wood. His house must be as well roofed and wainscoted as the temple itself, or else it will not please him, 1 Kings vi. 15, 16. Nay, it must exceed that, for it must be painted with *minium*, or *vermilion*, which dyes red, or, as some read it, with *indigo*, which dyes blue. No doubt it is lawful for princes and great men to build, and beautify, and furnish their houses so as is agreeable to their dignity; but he that knows what is in man knew that Jehoiakim did this in the pride of his heart, which makes that to be sinful, exceedingly sinful, which is in itself lawful. Those therefore that are enlarging their houses, and making them more sumptuous, have need to look well to the frame of their own spirits in the doing of it, and carefully to watch against all the workings of vain-glory. But that which was particularly amiss in Jehoiakim's case was that he did this when he could not but perceive, both by the word of God and by his providence, that divine judgments were breaking in upon him. He reigned his first three years by the permission and allowance of the king of Egypt, and all the rest by the permission and allowance of the king of Babylon; and yet he that was no better than a viceroy will covet to vie with the greatest monarchs in building and furniture. Observe how peremptory he is in this resolution: "*I will build myself a wide house; I am resolved I will*, whoever advises me to the contrary." Note, It is the common folly of those that are sinking in their estates to covet to make a fair show. Many have unhumbled hearts under humbling providences, and look most haughty when God is bringing them down. This is striving with our Maker. (2.) Carnal security and confidence in his wealth, depending upon the continuance of his prosperity, as if his mountain now stood so strong that it could never be moved. He thought he must reign without any disturbance or interruption because he had *enclosed himself in cedar* (v. 15), as if that were too fine to be assaulted and too strong to be broken through, and as if God himself could not, for pity, give up such a stately house as that to be burned. Thus when Christ spoke of the destruction of the temple his disciples came to him, to show him what a magnificent structure it was, Matt. xxiii. 38; xxiv. 1. Note, Those wretchedly deceive themselves who think their present prosperity is a lasting security, and dream of reigning because they are *enclosed in cedar*. It is but in his own conceit that *the rich man's wealth is his strong city*. (3.) Some think he is here charged with sacrilege, and robbing the house of God to beautify and adorn his own house. He *cuts him out my windows* (so it is in the margin), which

some understand as if he had taken windows out of the temple to put into his own palace and then *painted them* (as it follows) *with vermilion*, that it might not be discovered, but might look of a piece with his own buildings. Note, Those cheat themselves, and ruin themselves at last, who think to enrich themselves by robbing God and his house; and, however they may disguise it, God discovers it. (4.) He is here charged with extortion and oppression, violence and injustice. He *built his house by unrighteousness*, with money unjustly got and materials which were not honestly come by, and perhaps upon ground obtained as Ahab obtained Naboth's vineyard. And, because he went beyond what he could afford, he defrauded his workmen of their wages, which is one of the sins that *cries in the ears of the Lord of hosts*, Jam. v. 4. God takes notice of the wrong done by the greatest of men to their poor servants and labourers, and will repay those, in justice, that will not in justice pay those whom they employ, but *use their neighbour's service without wages*. Observe, The greatest of men must look upon the meanest as their neighbours, and be just to them accordingly, and love them as themselves. Jehoiakim was oppressive, not only in his buildings, but in the administration of his government. He did not do justice, made no conscience of shedding innocent blood, when it was to serve the purposes of his ambition, avarice, and revenge. He was all for *oppression and violence*, not to threaten it only, but to do it; and, when he was set upon any act of injustice, nothing should stop him, but he would go through with it. And that which was at the bottom of all was covetousness, that love of money which is the root of all evil. *Thy eyes and thy heart are not but for covetousness*; they were for that, and nothing else. Observe, In covetousness the heart walks after the eyes: it is therefore called *the lust of the eye*, 1 John ii. 16; Job xxxi. 7. It is *setting the eyes upon that which is not*, Prov. xxiii. 5. The eyes and the heart are then for covetousness when the aims and affections are wholly set upon the wealth of this world; and, where they are so, the temptation is strong to murder, oppression, and all manner of violence and villany. (5.) That which aggravated all his sins was that he was the son of a good father, who had left him a good example, if he would but have followed it (v. 15, 16): *Did not thy father eat and drink?* When Jehoiakim enlarged and enlightened his house it is probable that he spoke scornfully of his father for contenting himself with such a mean and inconvenient dwelling, below the grandeur of a sovereign prince, and ridiculed him as one that had a dull fancy, a low spirit, and could not find in his heart to lay out his money, nor cared for what was fashionable; that should not serve him which served his father: but God, by the prophet, tells him that his father,



though he had not the spirit of building, was a man of an excellent spirit, a better man than he, and did better for himself and his family. Those children that despise their parents' old fashions commonly come short of their real excellences. Jeremiah tells him, [1.] That he was directed to do his duty by his father's practice: He *did judgment and justice*; he never did wrong to any of his subjects, never oppressed them, nor put any hardship upon them, but was careful to preserve all their just rights and properties. Nay, he not only did not abuse his power for the support of wrong, but he used it for the maintaining of right. He *judged the cause of the poor and needy*, was ready to hear the cause of the meanest of his subjects and do them justice. Note, The care of magistrates must be, not to support their grandeur and take their ease, but to do good, not only not to oppress the poor themselves, but to defend those that are oppressed. [2.] That he was encouraged to do his duty by his father's prosperity. *First*, God accepted him: "*Was not this to know me, saith the Lord?*" Did he not hereby make it to appear that he rightly knew his God, and worshipped him, and consequently was known and owned of him?" Note, The right knowledge of God consists in doing our duty, particularly that which is the duty of our place and station in the world. *Secondly*, He himself had the comfort of it: *Did he not eat and drink* soberly and cheerfully, so as to fit himself for his business, *for strength and not for drunkenness?* Eccl. x. 17. He *did eat, and drink, and do judgment*; he did not (as perhaps Jehoiakim and his princes did) *drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of the afflicted*, Prov. xxxi. 5. He *did eat and drink*; that is, God blessed him with great plenty, and he had the comfortable enjoyment of it himself and gave handsome entertainments to his friends, was very hospitable and very charitable. It was Jehoiakim's pride that he had built a fine house, but Josiah's true praise that he kept a good house. Many times those have least in them of true generosity that have the greatest affection for pomp and grandeur; for, to support the extravagant expense of that, hospitality, bounty to the poor, yea, and justice itself, will be pinched. It is better to live with Josiah in an old-fashioned house, and do good, than live with Jehoiakim in a stately house, and leave debts unpaid. Josiah did *justice and judgment*, and then *it was well with him*, v. 15, and it is repeated again, v. 16. He lived very comfortably; his own subjects, and all his neighbours, respected him; and whatever he put his hand to prospered. Note, While we do well we may expect it will be well with us. This Jehoiakim knew, that his father found the way of duty to be the way of comfort, and yet he would not tread in his steps. Note, It should engage us to keep up religion in our day that our godly parents

kept it up in theirs and recommended it to us from their own experience of the benefit of it. They told us that they had found the promises which godliness has of the *life that now is* made good to them, and that religion and piety are friendly to outward prosperity. So that we are inexcusable if we turn aside from that good way.

2. Here we have Jehoiakim's doom faithfully read, v. 18, 19. We may suppose that it was in the utmost peril of his own life that Jeremiah here foretold the shameful death of Jehoiakim; but *thus saith the Lord concerning him*, and therefore *thus saith he*. (1.) He shall die unlamented; he shall make himself so odious by his oppression and cruelty that all about him shall be glad to part with him, and none shall do him the honour of dropping one tear for him, whereas his father, who *did judgment and justice*, was universally lamented; and it is promised to Zedekiah that he should be lamented at his death, for he conducted himself better than Jehoiakim had done, ch. xxxiv. 5. His relations shall not lament him, no, not with the common expressions of grief used at the funeral of the meanest, where they cried, *Ah, my brother!* or, *Ah, sister!* His subjects shall not lament him, nor cry out, as they used to do at the graves of their princes, *Ah, lord!* or, *Ah his glory!* It is sad for any to live so that, when they die, none will be sorry to part with them. Nay, (2.) He shall lie unburied. This is worse than the former. Even those that have no tears to grace the funerals of the dead with would willingly have them buried out of their sight; but Jehoiakim shall be *buried with the burial of an ass*, that is, he shall have no burial at all, but his dead body shall be cast into a ditch or upon a dunghill; it shall be *drawn*, or dragged, ignominiously, and *cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem*. It is said, in the story of Jehoiakim (2 Chron. xxxvi. 6), that Nebuchadnezzar *bound him in fetters, to carry him to Babylon*, and (Ezek. xix. 9) that he was *brought in chains to the king of Babylon*. But it is probable that he died a prisoner, before he was carried away to Babylon as was intended; perhaps he died for grief, or, in the pride of his heart, hastened his own end, and, for that reason, was denied a decent burial, as self-murderers usually are with us. Josephus says that Nebuchadnezzar slew him at Jerusalem, and left his body thus exposed, somewhere at a great distance from the *gates of Jerusalem*. And it is said (2 Kings xxiv. 6) *he slept with his fathers*. When he built himself a stately house, no doubt he designed himself a stately sepulchre; but see how he was disappointed. Note, Those that are lifted up with great pride are commonly reserved for some great disgrace in life or death.

20 Go up to Lebanon, and cry; and lift up thy voice in Bashan, and



cry from the passages: for all thy lovers are destroyed. 21 I spake unto thee in thy prosperity; but thou saidst, I will not hear. This *hath been* thy manner from thy youth, that thou obeyest not my voice. 22 The wind shall eat up all thy pastors, and thy lovers shall go into captivity: surely then shalt thou be ashamed and confounded for all thy wickedness. 23 O inhabitant of Lebanon, that makest thy nest in the cedars, how gracious shalt thou be when pangs come upon thee, the pain as of a woman in travail! 24 As I live, saith the LORD, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence; 25 And I will give thee into the hand of them that seek thy life, and into the hand of *them* whose face thou fearest, even into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of the Chaldeans. 26 And I will cast thee out, and thy mother that bare thee, into another country, where ye were not born; and there shall ye die. 27 But to the land whereunto they desire to return, thither shall they not return. 28 Is this man Coniah a despised broken idol? *is he* a vessel wherein *is* no pleasure? wherefore are they cast out, he and his seed, and are cast into a land which they know not? 29 O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the LORD. 30 Thus saith the LORD, Write ye this man childless, a man *that* shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah.

This prophecy seems to have been calculated for the ungracious inglorious reign of Jeconiah, or Jehoiachin, the son of Jehoiakim, who succeeded him in the government, reigned but three months, and was then carried captive to Babylon, where he lived many years, *ch. lii. 31*. We have, in these verses, a prophecy,

1. Of the desolations of the kingdom, which were now hastening on apace, *v. 20—23*. Jerusalem and Judah are here spoken to, or the Jewish state as a single person, and we have it here under a threefold character:—1. Very haughty in a day of peace and safety (*v. 21*): “*I spoke unto thee in thy*

*prosperity*, spoke by my servants the prophets, reproofs, admonitions, counsels, but thou saidst, *I will not hear*, I will not heed, thou obeyedst not my voice, and wast resolved that thou wouldst not, and hadst the front to tell me so.” It is common for those that live at ease to live in contempt of the word of God. *Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked*. This is so much the worse that they had it by kind: *This has been thy manner from thy youth*. They were called *transgressors from the womb*, *Isa. xlviii. 8*. 2. Very timorous upon the alarms of trouble (*v. 20*): “When thou seest *all thy lovers destroyed*, when thou findest thy idols unable to help thee and thy foreign alliances failing thee, thou wilt then go up to Lebanon, and cry, as one undone and giving up all for lost, cry with a bitter cry; thou wilt cry, *Help, help, or we are lost*; thou wilt lift up thy voice in fearful shrieks upon Lebanon and Bashan, two high hills, in hope to be heard thence by the advantage of the rising ground. Thou wilt cry from the passages, from the roads, where thou wilt ever and anon be in distress.” Thou wilt cry from *Abarim* (so some read it, as a proper name), a famous mountain in the border of Moab. “Thou wilt cry, as those that are in great consternation use to do, to all about thee; but in vain, for (*v. 22*) *the wind shall eat up all thy pastors, or rulers*, that should protect and lead thee, and provide for thy safety; they shall be blasted, and withered, and brought to nothing, as buds and blossoms are by a bleak or freezing wind; they shall be devoured suddenly, insensibly, and irresistibly, as fruits by the wind. *Thy lovers*, that thou dependest upon and hast an affection for, shall go into captivity, and shall be so far from saving thee that they shall not be able to save themselves.” 3. Very tame under the heavy and lasting pressures of trouble: “When there appears no relief from any of thy confederates, and thy own priests are at a loss, then shalt thou be ashamed and confounded for all thy wickedness,” *v. 22*. Note, Many will never be ashamed of their sins till they are brought by them to the last extremity; and it is well if we get this good by our straits to be brought by them to confusion for our sins. The Jewish state is here called an *inhabitant of Lebanon*, because that famous forest was within their border (*v. 23*), and all their country was wealthy, and well-guarded as with Lebanon’s natural fastnesses; but so proud and haughty were they that they are said to *make their nest in the cedars*, where they thought themselves out of the reach of all danger, and whence they looked with contempt upon all about them. “But, *how gracious wilt thou be when pangs come upon thee!* Then thou wilt humble thyself before God and promise amendment. When thou art overthrown in stony places thou wilt be glad to hear those words which in thy prosperity thou wouldst not hear, *Ps.*



exli. 6. 'Then thou wilt endeavour to make thyself acceptable with that God whom, before, thou madest light of.' Note, Many have their pangs of piety who, when the pangs are over, show that they have no true piety. Some give another sense of it: "What will all thy pomp, and state, and wealth avail thee? What will become of it all, or what comfort shalt thou have of it, when thou shalt be in these distresses? No more than a woman in travail, full of pains and fears, can take comfort in her ornaments while she is in that condition." So Mr. Gataker. Note, Those that are proud of their worldly advantages would do well to consider how they will look when pangs come upon them, and how they will then have lost all their beauty.

II. Here is a prophecy of the disgrace of the king; his name was *Jeconiah*, but he is here once and again called *Coniah*, in contempt. The prophet shortens or nicks his name, and gives him, as we say, a nickname, perhaps to denote that he should be despoiled of his dignity, that his reign should be shortened, and the number of his months cut off in the midst. Two instances of dishonour are here put upon him:—

1. He shall be carried away *into captivity* and shall spend and end his days in bondage. He was born to a crown, but it should quickly fall from his head, and he should exchange it for fetters. Observe the steps of this judgment. (1.) God will abandon him, *v. 24*. The God of truth says it, and confirms it with an oath: "*Though he were the signet upon my right hand* (his predecessors have been so, and he might have been so if he had conducted himself well, but he being degenerated) *I will pluck him thence*." The godly kings of Judah had been as signets on God's right hand, near and dear to him; he had gloried in them, and made use of them as instruments of his government, as the prince does of his signet-ring, or sign manual; but Coniah has made himself utterly unworthy of the honour, and therefore the privilege of his birth shall be no security to him; notwithstanding that, he shall be thrown off. Answerable to this threatening against Jeconiah is God's promise to Zerubbabel, when he made him his people's guide in their return out of captivity (*Hag. ii. 23*): *I will take thee, O Zerubbabel! my servant, and make thee as a signet*. Those that think themselves as signets on God's right hand must not be secure, but fear lest they be plucked thence. (2.) The king of Babylon shall seize him. Those know not what enemies and mischiefs they lie exposed to who have thrown themselves out of God's protection, *v. 25*. The Chaldeans are here said to be such as had a spite to *Coniah*; they sought his life; no less than that, they thought, would satisfy their rage; they were such as he had a dread of (they are those whose face thou fearest) which would make

it the more terrible to him to fall into their hands, especially when it was God himself that gave him into their hands. And, if God deliver him to them, who can deliver him from them? (3.) He and his family shall be carried to Babylon, where they shall wear out many tedious years of their lives in a miserable captivity—he and his mother (*v. 26*), he and his seed (*v. 28*), that is, he and all the royal family (for he had no children of his own when he went into captivity), or he and the children in his loins; they shall all be cast out to another country, to a strange country, a country where they were not born, nor such a country as that where they were born, a land which they know not, in which they have no acquaintance with whom to converse or from whom to expect any kindness. Thither they shall be carried, from a land where they were entitled to dominion, into a land where they shall be compelled to servitude. But have they no hopes of seeing their own country again? No: *To the land whereunto they desire to return, thither shall they not return, v. 27*. 'They conducted themselves ill in it when they were in it, and therefore they shall never see it more. Jehoahaz was carried to Egypt, the land of the south, Jeconiah to Babylon, the land of the north, both far remote, the quite contrary way, and must never expect to meet again, nor either of them to breathe their native air again. Those that had abused the dominion they had over others were justly brought thus under the dominion of others. Those that had indulged and gratified their sinful desires, by their oppression, luxury, and cruelty, were justly denied the gratification of their innocent desire to see their own native country again. We may observe something very emphatic in that part of this threatening (*v. 26*), *In the country where you were not born, there shall you die*. As there is a time to be born and a time to die, so there is a place to be born in and a place to die in. We know where we were born, but where we shall die we know not; it is enough that our God knows. Let it be our care that we die in Christ, and then it will be well with us, wherever we die, though it should be in a far country. (4.) This shall render him very mean and despicable in the eyes of all his neighbours. They shall be ready to say (*v. 28*), "*Is this Coniah a despised broken idol?*" Yes, certainly he is, and much debased from what he was." [1.] Time was when he was dignified, nay, when he was almost deified. The people who had seen his father lately deposed were ready to adore him when they saw him upon the throne, but now he is a despised broken idol, which, when it was whole, was worshipped, but, when it is rotten and broken, is thrown by and despised, and nobody regards it, or remembers what it has been. Note, What is idolized will, first or last, be despised and

broken; what is unjustly honoured will be justly contemned, and rivals with God will be the scorn of man. Whatever we idolize we shall be disappointed in and then shall despise. [2.] Time was when he was delighted in; but now he is a *vessel in which is no pleasure*, or to which there is no desire, either because grown out of fashion or because cracked or dirtied, and so rendered unserviceable. Those whom God has no pleasure in will, some time or other, be so mortified that men will have no pleasure in them.

2. He shall leave no posterity to inherit his honour. The prediction of this is ushered in with a solemn preface (v. 29): *O earth, earth, earth! hear the word of the Lord.* Let all the inhabitants of the world take notice of these judgments of God upon a nation and a family that had been near and dear to him, and thence infer that God is impartial in the administration of justice. Or it is an appeal to the earth itself on which we tread, since those that dwell on earth are so deaf and careless, like that (Isa. i. 2), *Hear, O heavens! and give ear, O earth!* God's word, however slighted, will be heard; the earth itself will be made to hear it, and yield to it, when it, and all the works that are therein, shall be burnt up. Or it is a call to men that *mind earthly things*, that are swallowed up in those things and are inordinate in the pursuit of them; such have need to be called upon again and again, and a third time, to *hear the word of the Lord.* Or it is a call to men considered as mortal, of the earth, and hastening to the earth again. We all are so; earth we are, *dust we are*, and, in consideration of that, are concerned to hear and regard *the word of the Lord*, that, though we are earth, we may be found among those whose names are written in heaven. Now that which is here to be taken notice of is that Jeconiah is *written childless* (v. 30), that is, as it follows, *No man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David.* In him the line of David was extinct as a royal line. Some think that he had children born in Babylon because mention is made of his seed being cast out there (v. 28) and that they died before him. We read in the genealogy (1 Chron. iii. 17) of seven sons of Jeconiah Assir (that is, Jeconiah the captive) of whom Salathiel is the first. Some think that they were only his adopted sons, and that when it is said (Matt. i. 12), *Jeconiah begat Salathiel*, no more is meant than that he bequeathed to him what claims and pretensions he had to the government, the rather because Salathiel is called *the son of Neri of the house of Nathan*, Luke iii. 27, 31. Whether he had children begotten, or only adopted, thus far he was childless that none of his seed ruled as kings in Judah. He was the *Augustulus* of that empire, in whom it determined. Whoever

are childless, it is God that writes them so; and those who take no care to do good in their days cannot expect to prosper in their days.

### CHAP. XXIII.

In this chapter the prophet, in God's name, is dealing his reproofs and threatenings, I. Among the careless princes, or pastors of the people (ver. 1, 2), yet promising to take care of the flock, which they had been wanting in their duty to, ver. 3-8. II. Among the wicked prophets and priests, whose bad character is here given at large in divers instances, especially their imposing upon the people with their pretended inspirations, at which the prophet is astonished, and for which they must expect to be punished, ver. 9-32. III. Among the profane people, who ridiculed God's prophets and bantered them, ver. 33-40. When all have thus corrupted their way they must all expect to be told faithfully of it.

**W**OE be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the LORD. 2 Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the LORD. 3 And I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. 4 And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the LORD. 5 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a king shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. 6 In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this *is* his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. 7 Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that they shall no more say, The LORD liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; 8 But, The LORD liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries whither I had driven them; and they shall dwell in their own land.

I. Here is a word of terror to the negligent shepherds. The day is at hand when God will reckon with them concerning the trust and charge committed to them: *Woe be to the pastors* (to the rulers, both in church and state) who should be to those



they are set over as pastors to lead them, feed them, protect them, and take care of them. They are not owners of the sheep. God here calls them *the sheep of my pasture*, whom I am interested in, and have provided good pasture for. Woe be to those therefore who are commanded to feed God's people, and pretend to do it, but who, instead of that, *scatter the flock*, and *drive them away* by their violence and oppression, and *have not visited them*, nor taken any care for their welfare, nor concerned themselves at all to do them good. In not visiting them, and doing their duty to them, they did in effect scatter them and drive them away. The beasts of prey scattered them, and the shepherds are in the fault, who should have kept them together. *Woe be to them* when God will visit upon them the evil of their doings and deal with them as they deserve. They would not visit the flock in a way of duty, and therefore God will visit them in a way of vengeance.

II. Here is a word of comfort to the neglected sheep. Though the under-shepherds take no care of them, no pains with them, but betray them, the chief Shepherd will look after them. *When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord taketh me up.* Though the interests of God's church in the world are neglected by those who should take care of them, and postponed to their own private secular interests, yet they shall not therefore sink. God will perform his promise, though those he employs do not perform their duty.

1. The dispersed Jews shall at length return to their own land, and be happily settled there under a good government, v. 3, 4. Though there be but a remnant of God's flock left, a little remnant, that has narrowly escaped destruction, he will gather that remnant, will find them out wherever they are and find out ways and means to bring them back out of all countries *whither he had driven them*. It was the justice of God, for the sin of their shepherds, that dispersed them; but the mercy of God shall gather in the sheep, when the shepherds that betrayed them are cut off. *They shall be brought* to their former habitations, as sheep to their folds, and there *they shall be fruitful, and increase* in numbers. And, though their former shepherds took no care of them, it does not therefore follow that they shall have no more. If some have abused a sacred office, that is no good reason why it should be abolished. "They destroyed the sheep, but I will set shepherds over them who shall make it their business to feed them." Formerly they were continually exposed and disturbed with some alarm or other; but now *they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed*; they shall be in no danger from without, in no fright from within. Formerly some or other of them were ever and anon picked up by the beasts

of prey; but now *none of them shall be lacking*, none of them missing. Though the times may have been long bad with the church, it does not follow that they will be ever so. Such pastors as Zerubbabel and Nehemiah, though they lived not in the pomp that Jehoiakim and Jeconiah did, nor made such a figure, were as great blessings to the people as the others were plagues to them. The church's peace is not bound up in the pomp of her rulers.

2. Messiah the Prince, that great and good Shepherd of the sheep, shall in the latter days be raised up to bless his church, and to be *the glory of his people Israel*, v. 5, 6. The house of David seemed to be quite sunk and ruined by that threatening against Jeconiah (*ch. xxii. 30*), that none of his seed should ever *sit upon the throne of David*. But here is a promise which effectually secures the honour of the covenant made with David notwithstanding; for by it the house will be raised out of its ruins to a greater lustre than ever, and shine brighter far than it did in Solomon himself. We have not so many prophecies of Christ in this book as we had in that of the prophet Isaiah; but here we have one, and a very illustrious one; of him doubtless the prophet here speaks, of him, and of no other man. The first words intimate that it would be long ere this promise should have its accomplishment: *The days come*, but they are not yet. *I shall see him, but not now*. But all the rest intimate that the accomplishment of it will be glorious. (1.) Christ is here spoken of as a *branch from David*, *the man the branch* (*Zech. iii. 8*), his appearance mean, his beginnings small, like those of a bud or sprout, and his rise seemingly out of the earth, but growing to be green, to be great, to be loaded with fruits. A branch from David's family, when it seemed to be a *root in a dry ground*, buried, and not likely to revive. Christ is the *root and offspring of David*, *Rev. xxii. 16*. In him doth the *horn of David bud*, *Ps. cxxxii. 17, 18*. He is a branch of God's raising up; he sanctified him, and sent him into the world, gave him his commission and qualifications. He is a *righteous branch*, for he is righteous himself, and through him many, even all that are his, are made righteous. As an advocate, he is *Jesus Christ the righteous*. (2.) He is here spoken of as his church's King. This branch shall be raised as high as the throne of his father David, and there *he shall reign and prosper*, not as the kings that now were of the house of David, who went backward in all their affairs. No; he shall set up a kingdom in the world that shall be victorious over all opposition. In the chariot of the everlasting gospel he shall go forth, he shall go on *conquering and to conquer*. If God raise him up, he will prosper him, for he will own the work of his own hands; what *is the good pleasure of the Lord shall prosper*

in the hands of those to whom it is committed. He shall prosper; for *he shall execute judgment and justice in the earth*, all the world over, Ps. xcvi. 13. The present kings of the house of David were unjust and oppressive, and therefore it is no wonder that they did not prosper. But Christ shall, by his gospel, break the usurped power of Satan, institute a perfect rule of holy living, and, as far as it prevails, make all the world righteous. The effect of this shall be a holy security and serenity of mind in all his faithful loyal subjects. *In his days*, under his dominion, *Judah shall be saved and Israel shall dwell safely*; that is, all the spiritual seed of believing Abraham and praying Jacob shall be protected from the curse of heaven and the malice of hell, shall be privileged from the arrests of God's law and delivered from the attempts of Satan's power, shall be saved from sin, the guilt and dominion of it, and then shall *dwell safely*, and be quiet from the fear of all evil. See Luke i. 74, 75. Those that shall be saved hereafter from the wrath to come may dwell safely now; for, *if God be for us, who can be against us?* In the days of Christ's government in the soul, when he is uppermost there, the soul *dwells at ease*. (3.) He is here spoken of as *The Lord our righteousness*. Observe, [1.] Who and what he is. As God, he is *Jehovah*, the incommunicable name of God, denoting his eternity and self-existence. As Mediator, he is *our righteousness*. By making satisfaction to the justice of God for the sin of man, he has brought in an everlasting righteousness, and so made it over to us in the covenant of grace that, upon our believing consent to that covenant, it becomes ours. His being *Jehovah our righteousness* implies that he is so our righteousness as no creature could be. He is a sovereign, all-sufficient, eternal righteousness. All our righteousness has its being from him, and by him it subsists, and we are made *the righteousness of God in him*. [2.] The profession and declaration of this: *This is the name whereby he shall be called*, not only he shall be so, but he shall be known to be so. God shall call him by this name, for he shall appoint him to be *our righteousness*. By this name Israel shall call him, every true believer shall call him, and call upon him. That is our righteousness by which, as an allowed plea, we are justified before God, acquitted from guilt, and accepted into favour; and nothing else have we to plead but this, "Christ has died, yea, rather has risen again;" and we have taken him for our Lord.

3. This great salvation, which will come to the Jews in the latter days of their state, after their return out of Babylon, shall be so illustrious as far to outshine the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt (v. 7, 8): *They shall no more say, The Lord liveth that brought up Israel out of Egypt; but, The Lord liveth*

*that brought them up out of the north*. This we had before, ch. xvi. 14, 15. But here it seems to point more plainly than it did there to the days of the Messiah, and to compare not so much the two deliverances themselves (giving the preference to the latter) as the two states to which the church by degrees grew after those deliverances. Observe the proportion: Just 480 years after they had come out of Egypt Solomon's temple was built (1 Kings vi. 1); and at that time that nation, which was so wonderfully brought up out of Egypt, had gradually arrived to its height, to its zenith. Just 490 years (70 weeks) after they came out of Babylon Messiah the Prince set up the gospel temple, which was the greatest glory of that nation that was so wonderfully brought out of Babylon; see Dan. ix. 24, 25. Now the spiritual glory of the second part of that nation, especially as transferred to the gospel church, is much more admirable and illustrious than all the temporal glory of the first part of it in the days of Solomon; for that was no glory compared with the glory which excelleth.

9 Mine heart within me is broken, because of the prophets; all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine hath overcome, because of the LORD, and because of the words of his holiness. 10 For the land is full of adulterers; for because of swearing the land mourneth; the pleasant places of the wilderness are dried up, and their course is evil, and their force is not right. 11 For both prophet and priest are profane; yea, in my house have I found their wickedness, saith the LORD. 12 Wherefore their way shall be unto them as slippery ways in the darkness: they shall be driven on, and fall therein: for I will bring evil upon them, even the year of their visitation, saith the LORD. 13 And I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria; they prophesied in Baal, and caused my people Israel to err. 14 I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem a horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evil doers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah. 15 Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets; Behold, I will feed them



with wormwood, and make them drink the water o. gall: for from the prophets of Jerusalem is profaneness gone forth into all the land. 16 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Harken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, *and not out of the mouth of the LORD.* 17 They say still unto them that despise me, The LORD hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you. 18 For who hath stood in the counsel of the LORD, and hath perceived and heard his word? who hath marked his word, and heard *it*? 19 Behold, a whirlwind of the LORD is gone forth in fury, even a grievous whirlwind: it shall fall grievously upon the head of the wicked. 20 The anger of the LORD shall not return, until he have executed, and till he have performed the thoughts of his heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly. 21 I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. 22 But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings. 23 *Am* I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off? 24 Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD. 25 I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed. 26 How long shall *this* be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? yea, *they are* prophets of the deceit of their own heart; 27 Which think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams which they tell every man to his neighbour, as their fathers have forgotten my name for Baal. 28 The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my

word faithfully. What *is* the chaff to the wheat? saith the LORD. 29 *Is* not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer *that* breaketh the rock in pieces? 30 Therefore, behold, I *am* against the prophets, saith the LORD, that steal my words every one from his neighbour. 31 Behold, I *am* against the prophets, saith the LORD, that use their tongues, and say, He saith. 32 Behold, I *am* against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD.

Here is a long lesson for the false prophets. As none were more bitter and spiteful against God's true prophets than they, so there were none on whom the true prophets were more severe, and justly. The prophet had complained to God of those false prophets (*ch. xiv. 13*), and had often foretold that they should be involved in the common ruin; but here they have woes of their own.

I. He expresses the deep concern that he was under upon this account, and what a trouble it was to him to see men who pretended to a divine commission and inspiration ruining themselves, and the people among whom they dwelt, by their falsehood and treachery (*v. 9*): *My heart within me is broken; I am like a drunken man.* His head was in confusion with wonder and astonishment; his heart was under oppression with grief and vexation. Jeremiah was a man that laid things much to heart, and what was any way threatening to his country made a deep impression upon his spirits. He is here in trouble, 1. *Because of the prophets* and their sin, the false doctrine they preached, the wicked lives they lived; especially it filled him with horror to hear them making use of God's name and pretending to have their instructions from him. Never was the Lord so abused, and the words of his holiness, as by these men. Note, The dishonour done to God's name, and the profanation of his holy word, are the greatest grief imaginable to a gracious soul. 2. *"Because of the Lord,* and his judgments, which by this means are brought in upon us like a deluge." He trembled to think of the ruin and desolation which were coming from the face of the Lord (so the word is) and from the face of the word of his holiness, which will be inflicted by the power of God's wrath, according to the threatenings of his word, confirmed by his holiness. Note, Even those that have God for them cannot but tremble

to think of the misery of those that have God against them.

II. He laments the abounding abominable wickedness of the land and the present tokens of God's displeasure they were under for it (v. 10): *The land is full of adulterers*; it is full both of spiritual and corporal whoredom. They go a whoring from God, and, having cast off the fear of him, no marvel that they abandon themselves to all manner of lewdness; and, having dishonoured themselves and their own bodies, they dishonour God and his name by rash and false swearing, *because of which the land mourns*. Both perjury and common swearing are sins for which a land must mourn in true repentance or it will be made to mourn under the judgments of God. Their land mourned now under the judgment of famine; the *pleasant places*, or rather the *pastures*, or (as some read it) *the habitations of the wilderness*, are dried up for want of rain, and yet we see no signs of repentance. They answer not the end of the correction. The tenour and tendency of men's conversations are sinful, *their course continues evil*, as bad as ever, and they will not be diverted from it. They have a great deal of resolution, but it is turned the wrong way; they are *zealously affected*, but not in a good thing: *Their force is not right*; their heart is *fully set in them to do evil*, and they are not valiant for the truth, have not courage enough to break off their evil courses, though they see God thus contending with them.

III. He charges it all upon the prophets and priests, especially the prophets. They are *both profane* (v. 11); the priests profane the ordinances of God they pretend to administer; the prophets profane the word of God they pretend to deliver; their converse and all their conversation are profane, and then it is not strange that the people are so debauched. They both *play the hypocrite* (so some read it); under sacred pretensions they carry on the vilest designs; yea, not only in their own houses, and the bad houses they frequent, but *in my house have I found their wickedness*; in the temple, where the priests ministered, where the prophets prophesied, there were they guilty both of idolatry and immorality. See a woeful instance in Hophni and Phinehas, 1 Sam. ii. 22. God searches his house, and what wickedness is there he will find it out; and the nearer it is to him the more offensive it is. Two things are charged upon them:—1. That they taught people to sin by their examples. He compares them with the prophets of Samaria, the head city of the kingdom of the ten tribes, which had been long since laid waste. It was the folly of the prophets of Samaria that *they prophesied in Baal*, in Baal's name; so Ahab's prophets did, and so *they caused my people Israel to err*, to forsake the service of the true God and to worship Baal, v. 13. Now the prophets of Jerusalem did not do

so; they prophesied in the name of the true God, and valued themselves upon that, that they were not like the prophets of Samaria, who prophesied in Baal; but what the better, when they debauched the nation as much by their immoralities as the other had done by their idolatries? It is a horrible thing in the prophets of Jerusalem that they make use of the name of the holy God, and yet wallow in all manner of impurity; they make nothing of committing adultery. They make use of the name of the God of truth, and yet *walk in lies*; they not only prophesy lies, but in their common conversation one cannot believe a word they say. It is all either jest and banter or fraud and design. Thus they encourage sinners to go on in their wicked ways; for every one will say, "Surely we may do as the prophets do; who can expect that we should be better than our teachers?" By this means it is that none returns from his wickedness; but they all say that they shall have *peace*, though they go on, for their prophets tell them so. By this means Judah and Jerusalem have become *as Sodom and Gomorrah*, that were wicked, and *sinners before the Lord exceedingly*; and God looked upon them accordingly as fit for nothing but to be destroyed, as they were, with fire and brimstone. 2. That they encouraged people in sin by their false prophecies. They made themselves believe that there was no harm, no danger in sin, and practised accordingly and then no marvel that they made others believe so too (v. 16): *They speak a vision of their own heart*; it is the product of their own invention, and agrees with their own inclination, but it is *not out of the mouth of the Lord*; he never dictated it to them, nor did it agree either with the law of Moses or with what God has spoken by other prophets. They tell sinners that it shall be well with them though they persist in their sins, v. 17. See here who those are that they encourage—those that *despise God*, that slight his authority, and have low and mean thoughts of his institutions, and those that *walk after the imagination of their own heart*, that are worshippers of idols and slaves to their own lusts; those that are devoted to their pleasures put contempt upon their God. Yet see how these prophets caressed and flattered them: they should have been still saying, There is no peace to those that go on in their evil ways—*Those that despise God shall be lightly esteemed*—Woe, and a thousand woes, to them; but they still said, *You shall have peace*; *no evil shall come upon you*. And, which was worst of all, they told them, *God has said so*, so making him to patronise sin, and to contradict himself. Note, Those that are resolved to go on in their evil ways will justly be given up to believe the strong delusions of those who tell them that they shall have peace though they go on.

IV. God disowns all that these false prophets said to sooth people up in their sins



(v. 21) *I have not sent these prophets*; they never had any mission from God. They were not only not sent by him on this errand, but they were never sent by him on any errand; he never had employed them in any service or business for him; and, as to this matter, whereas they pretended to have instructions from him to assure this people of peace, he declares that he never gave them any such instructions. Yet they were very forward—they ran; they were very bold—they prophesied without any of that difficulty with which the true prophets sometimes struggled. They said to sinners, *You shall have peace*. But (v. 18): “*Who hath stood in the counsel of the Lord?*” Who of you has, that are so confident of this? You deliver this message with a great deal of assurance; but have you consulted God about it? No; you never considered whether it be agreeable to the discoveries God has made of himself, whether it will consist with the honour of his holiness and justice, to let sinners go unpunished. You have not perceived and heard his word, nor marked that; you have not compared this with the scripture; if you had taken notice of that, and of the constant tenour of it, you would never have delivered such a message.” The prophets themselves must try the spirits by the touchstone of the law and of the testimony, as well as those to whom they prophesy; but which of those did so that prophesied of peace? That they did not stand in God’s counsel nor hear his word is proved afterwards, v. 22. *If they had stood in my counsel*, as they pretend, 1. They would have made the scriptures their standard: *They would have caused my people to hear my words*, and would have conscientiously kept closely to them. But, not speaking according to that rule, it is a plain evidence that there is no light in them. 2. They would have made the conversion of souls their business, and would have aimed at that in all their preaching. They would have done all they could to turn people from their evil way in general and from all the particular evil of their doings. They would have encouraged and assisted the reformation of manners, would have made this their scope in all their preaching, to part between men and their sins; but it appeared that this was a thing they never aimed at, but, on the contrary, to encourage sinners in their sins. 3. They would have had some seals of their ministry. This sense our translation gives it: *If they had stood in my counsel*, and the words they had preached had been my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way; a divine power should have gone along with the word for the conviction of sinners. God will bless his own institutions. Yet this is no certain rule; Jeremiah himself, though God sent him, prevailed with but few to turn from their evil way.

V. God threatens to punish these prophets for their wickedness. They promised

the people peace; and to show them the folly of that God tells them that they should have no peace themselves. They were very unfit to warrant the people, and pass their word to them that no evil shall come upon them, when all evil is coming upon themselves and they are not aware of it, v. 12. Because the prophets and priests are profane, therefore *their ways shall be unto them as slippery ways in the darkness*. Those that undertake to lead others, because they mislead them, and know they do so, shall themselves have no comfort in their way. 1. They pretend to show others the way, but they shall themselves be in the dark, or in a mist; their light or sight shall fail, so that they shall not be able to look before them, shall have no forecast for themselves. 2. They pretend to give assurances to others, but they themselves shall find no firm footing: *Their ways shall be to them as slippery ways*, in which they shall not go with any steadiness, safety, or satisfaction. 3. They pretend to make the people easy with their flatteries, but they shall themselves be uneasy: *They shall be driven*, forced forward as captives, or making their escape as those that are pursued, and *they shall fall in the way* by which they hoped to escape, and so fall into the enemies’ hands. 4. They pretend to prevent the evil that threatens others, but God will bring evil upon them, even the year of their visitation, the time fixed for calling them to an account; such a time is fixed concerning all that do not judge themselves, and it will be an evil time. *The year of visitation* is the year of recompences. It is further threatened (v. 15), *I will feed them with wormwood*, or poison, with that which is not only nauseous, but noxious, and make them drink waters of gall, or (as some read it) *juice of hemlock*; see ch. ix. 15. Justly is the cup of trembling put into their hand first, for from the prophets of Jerusalem, who should have been patterns of piety and every thing that is praiseworthy, even from them has profaneness gone forth into all the lands. Nothing more effectually debauches a nation than the debauchery of ministers.

VI. The people are here warned not to give any credit to these false prophets; for, though they flattered them with hopes of impunity, the judgments of God would certainly break out against them, unless they repented (v. 16): “Take notice of what God says, and hearken not to the words of these prophets; for you will find, in the issue, that God’s word shall stand, and not theirs. God’s word will make you serious, but they make you vain, feed you with vain hopes, which will fail you at last. They tell you, *No evil shall come upon you*; but hear what God says (v. 19), *Behold, a whirlwind of the Lord has gone forth in fury*. They tell you, *All shall be calm and serene*; but God tells you, *There is a storm coming, a whirlwind of the Lord*, of his sending, and therefore

there is no standing before it. It is a whirlwind raised by divine wrath; it has *gone forth in fury*, a wind that is brought forth out of the treasures of divine vengeance; and therefore it is a *grievous whirlwind*, and shall light heavily, with rain and hail, *upon the head of the wicked*, which they cannot avoid nor find any shelter from." It shall *fall upon the wicked* prophets themselves who deceived the people, and the wicked people who suffered themselves to be deceived. A *horrible tempest* shall be the portion of their cup, Ps. xi. 6. This sentence is bound on as irreversible (v. 20): *The anger of the Lord shall not return*, for the decree has gone forth. God will not alter his mind, nor suffer his anger to be turned away, *till he have executed the sentence and performed the thoughts of his heart*. God's whirlwind, when it comes *down from heaven, returns not thither, but accomplishes that for which he sent it*, Isa. lv. 11. This they will not consider now; but *in the latter days you shall consider it perfectly*, consider it *with understanding* (so the word is) or *with consideration*. Note, Those that will not fear the threatenings shall feel the execution of them, and will then perfectly understand what they will not now admit the evidence of, what a *fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of a just and jealous God*. Those that will not consider in time will be made to consider when it is too late. *Son, remember*.

VII. Several things are here offered to the consideration of these false prophets for their conviction, that, if possible, they might be brought to recant their error and acknowledge the cheat they had put upon God's people.

1. Let them consider that though they may impose upon men God is too wise to be imposed upon. Men cannot see through their fallacies, but God can and does. Here,

(1.) God asserts his own omnipresence and omniscience in general, v. 23, 24. When they told the people that no evil should befall them though they went on in their evil ways they went upon atheistical principles, that the Lord doth not see their sin, that he cannot judge through the dark cloud, that he will not require it; and therefore they must be taught the first principles of their religion, and confronted with the most incontestable self-evident truths. [1.] That though God's throne is prepared in the heavens, and this earth seems to be at a distance from him, yet he is a God here in this lower world, which seems to be afar off, as well as in the upper world, which seems to be at hand, v. 23. The eye of God is the same on earth that it is in heaven. Here it *runs to and fro* as well as there (2 Chron. xvi. 9); and what is in the minds of men, whose spirits are veiled in flesh, is as clearly seen by him as what is in the mind of angels, those unveiled spirits above that surround his throne. The power of God is the same

on earth among its inhabitants that it is in heaven among its armies. With us nearness and distance make a great difference both in our observations and in our operations, but it is not so with God; to him darkness and light, at hand and afar off, are both alike. [2.] That, how ingenious and industrious soever men are to disguise themselves and their own characters and counsels, they cannot possibly be concealed from God's all-seeing eye (v. 24): "*Can any hide himself in the secret places of the earth, that I shall not see him? Can any hide his projects and intentions in the secret places of the heart, that I shall not see them?*" No arts of concealment can hide men from the eye of God, nor deceive his judgment of them. [3.] That he is every where present; he does not only rule heaven and earth, and uphold both by his universal providence, but he *fills heaven and earth* by his essential presence, Ps. cxxxix. 7, 8, &c. No place can either include him or exclude him.

(2.) He applies this to these prophets, who had a notable art of disguising themselves (v. 25, 26): *I have heard what the prophets said that prophesy lies in my name*. They thought that he was so wholly taken up with the other world that he had no leisure to take cognizance of what passed in this. But God will make them know that he knows all their impostures, all the shams they have put upon the world, under colour of divine revelation. What they intended to humour the people with they pretended to have had from God in a dream, when there was no such thing. This they could not discover. If a man tell me that he dreamed so and so, I cannot contradict him; he knows I cannot. But God discovered the fraud. Perhaps the false prophets whispered what they had to say in the ears of such as were their confidants, saying, So and so *I have dreamed*; but God overheard them. The heart-searching eye of God traced them in all the methods they took to deceive the people, and he cries out, *How long? Shall I always bear with them? Is it in the hearts of those prophets* (so some read it) *to be ever prophesying lies and prophesying the deceits of their own hearts?* Will they never see what an affront they put upon God, what an abuse they put upon the people, and what judgments they are preparing for themselves?

2. Let them consider that their palming upon people counterfeit revelations, and fathering their own fancies upon divine inspiration, was the ready way to bring all religion into contempt and make men turn atheists and infidels; and this was the thing they really intended, though they frequently made mention of the name of God, and prefaced all they said with, *Thus saith the Lord*. Yet, says God, *They think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams*. They designed to draw people off from the wor-



ship of God, from all regard to God's laws and ordinances and the true prophets, as their fathers *forgot God's name for Baal*. Note, The great thing Satan aims at is to make people forget God, and all that whereby he has made himself known; and he has many subtle methods to bring them to this. Sometimes he does it by setting up false gods (bring men in love with Baal, and they soon forget the name of God), sometimes by misrepresenting the true God, as if he were altogether such a one as ourselves. Pretences to new revelation may prove as dangerous to religion as the denying of all revelation; and false prophets in God's name may perhaps do more mischief to the power of godliness than false prophets in Baal's name, as being less guarded against.

3. Let them consider what a vast difference there was between their prophecies and those that were delivered by the true prophets of the Lord (v. 28): *The prophet that has a dream*, which was the way of inspiration that the false prophets most pretended to, if he has a dream, *let him tell it as a dream*; so Mr. Gataker reads it. "Let him lay no more stress upon it than men do upon their dreams, nor expect any more regard to be had to it. Let them not say that it is from God, nor call their foolish dreams divine oracles. But let the true prophet, that has my word, *speaking my word faithfully, speak it as a truth*" (so some read it). "let him keep closely to his instructions, and you will soon perceive a vast difference between the dreams that the false prophets tell and the divine dictates which the true prophets deliver. He that pretends to have a message from God, whether by dream or voice, let him declare it, and it will easily appear which is of God and which is not. Those that have spiritual senses exercised will be able to distinguish; for *what is the chaff to the wheat?* The promises of peace which these prophets make to you are no more to be compared to God's promises than chaff to wheat." Men's fancies are light, and vain, and worthless, as the chaff *which the wind drives away*. But the word of God has substance in it; it is of value, is food for the soul, the bread of life. Wheat was the staple commodity of Canaan, that valley of vision, Deut. viii. 8; Ezek. xxvii. 17. There is as much difference between the vain fancies of men and the pure word of God as between the chaff and the wheat. It follows (v. 29), *Is not my word like a fire, saith the Lord?* Is their word so? Has it the power and efficacy that the word of God has? No; nothing like it; there is no more comparison than between painted fire and real fire. Theirs is like an *ignis fatuus*—a *deceiving meteor*, leading men into by-paths and dangerous precipices. Note, The word of God is like fire. The law was a fiery law (Deut. xxxiii. 2), and of the gospel Christ says, *I have come to send fire on the earth*, Luke xii. 49. Fire has different

effects, according as the matter is on which it works; it hardens clay, but softens wax; it consumes the dross, but purifies the gold. So the word of God is to some a *savour of life unto life*, to others of *death unto death*. God appeals here to the consciences of those to whom the word was sent: "*Is not my word like fire?*" Has it not been so to you? Zech. i. 6. *Speak as you have found.*" It is compared likewise to a *hammer breaking the rock in pieces*. The unhumbled heart of man is like a rock; if it will not be melted by the word of God as the fire, it will be broken to pieces by it as the hammer. Whatever opposition is given to the word, it will be borne down and broken to pieces.

4. Let them consider that while they went on in this course God was against them. Three times they are told this, v. 30, 31, 32. *Behold, I am against the prophets*. They pretended to be for God, and made use of his name, but were really against him; he looks upon them as they were really, and is against them. How can they be long safe, or at all easy, that have a God of almighty power against them? While these prophets were promising peace to the people God was proclaiming war against them. They stand indicted here, (1.) For robbery: *They steal my word every one from his neighbour*. Some understand it of that word of God which the good prophets preached; they stole their sermons, their expressions, and mingled them with their own, as hucksters mingle bad wares with some that are good, to make them vendible. Those that were strangers to the spirit of the true prophets mimicked their language, picked up some good sayings of theirs, and delivered them to the people as if they had been their own, but with an ill grace; they were not of a piece with the rest of their discourses. *The legs of the lame are not equal, so is a parable in the mouth of fools*, Prov. xxvi. 7. Others understand it of the word of God as it was received and entertained by some of the people; they stole it out of their hearts, as the wicked one in the parable is said to steal the good seed of the word, Matt. xiii. 19. By their insinuations they diminished the authority, and so weakened the efficacy, of the word of God upon the minds of those that seemed to be under convictions by it. (2.) They stand indicted for counterfeiting the broad seal. Therefore God is against them (v. 31), because they use their *tongues at their pleasure* in their discourses to the people; they say what they themselves think fit, and then father it upon God, pretend they had it from him, and say, He saith it. Some read it, *They smooth their tongues*; they are very complaisant to the people, and say nothing but what is pleasing and plausible; they never reprove them nor threaten them, but *their words are smoother than butter*. Thus they ingratiate themselves with them, and

get money by them; and they have the impudence and impiety to make God the patron of their lies; they say, "He saith so." What greater indignity can be done to the God of truth than to lay the brats of the father of lies at his door? (3.) They stand indicted as common cheats (v. 32): *I am against them, for they prophesy false dreams, pretending that to be a divine inspiration which is but an invention of their own. This is a horrid fraud; nor will it excuse them to say, Caveat emptor—Let the buyer take care of himself, and Si populus vult decipi, decipiatur—If people will be deceived, let them.* No; it is the people's fault that they err, that they take things upon trust, and do not try the spirits; but it is much more the prophets' fault that they cause God's people to err by their lies and by their lightness, by the flatteries of their preaching soothing them up in their sins, and by the looseness and lewdness of their conversation encouraging them to persist in them. [1.] God disowns their having any commission from him: *I sent them not, nor commanded them; they are not God's messengers, nor is what they say his message.* [2.] He therefore justly denies his blessing with them: *Therefore they shall not profit this people at all.* All the profit they aim at is to make them easy; but they shall not so much as do that, for God's providences will at the same time be making them uneasy. *They do not profit this people* (so some read it); and more is implied than is expressed; they not only do them no good, but do them a great deal of hurt. Note, Those that corrupt the word of God, while they pretend to preach it, are so far from edifying the church that they do it the greatest mischief imaginable.

33 And when this people, or the prophet, or a priest, shall ask thee, saying, What is the burden of the LORD? thou shalt then say unto them, What burden? I will even forsake you, saith the LORD. 34 And as for the prophet, and the priest, and the people, that shall say, The burden of the LORD, I will even punish that man and his house. 35 Thus shall ye say every one to his neighbour, and every one to his brother, What hath the LORD answered? and, What hath the LORD spoken? 36 And the burden of the LORD shall ye mention no more: for every man's word shall be his burden; for ye have perverted the words of the living God, of the LORD of hosts our God. 37 Thus shalt thou say to the prophet, What hath the LORD answered thee? and, What hath the LORD

spoken? 38 But since ye say, The burden of the LORD; therefore thus saith the LORD; Because ye say this word, The burden of the LORD, and I have sent unto you, saying, Ye shall not say, The burden of the LORD; 39 Therefore, behold, I, even I, will utterly forget you, and I will forsake you, and the city that I gave you and your fathers, and cast you out of my presence: 40 And I will bring an everlasting reproach upon you, and a perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten.

The profaneness of the people, with that of the priests and prophets, is here proved in a particular instance, which may seem of small moment in comparison of their greater crimes; but profaneness in common discourse, and the debauching of the language of a nation, being a notorious evidence of the prevalency of wickedness in it, we are not to think it strange that this matter was so largely and warmly insisted upon here. Observe,

1. The sin here charged upon them is bantering God's prophets and the dialect they used, and jesting with sacred things. They asked, *What is the burden of the Lord?* v. 33 and v. 34. They say, *The burden of the Lord*, v. 38. This was the word that gave great offence to God, that, whenever they spoke of the word of the Lord, they called it, in scorn and derision, *the burden of the Lord*. Now, 1. This was a word that the prophets much used, and used it seriously, to show what a weight the word of God was upon their spirits, of what importance it was, and how pressingly it should come upon those that heard it. The words of the false prophets had nothing ponderous in them, but God's words had; those were as chaff, these as wheat. Now the profane scoffers took this word, and made a jest and a by-word of it; they made people merry with it, that so, when the prophets used it, they might not make people serious with it. Note, It has been the artifice of Satan, in all ages, to obstruct the efficacy of sacred things by turning them into matter of sport and ridicule; the mocking of God's messengers was the baffling of his messages. 2. Perhaps this word was caught at and reproached by the scoffers as an improper word, newly-coined by the prophets, and not used in that sense by any classic author. It was only in this and the last age that the word of the Lord was called the burden of the Lord, and it could not be found in their lexicons to have that signification. But if men take a liberty, as we see they do, to form new phrases which they think more expressive and significant in other parts of learning, why not in divinity? But especially we



must observe it as a rule that the Spirit of God is not tied to our rules of speaking. 3. Some think that because when the *word of the Lord* is called a *burden* it signifies some word of reproof and threatening, which would lay a load upon the hearers (yet I know not whether that observation will always hold), therefore in using this word *the burden of the Lord* in a canting way they reflected upon God as always bearing hard upon them, always teasing them, always frightening them, and so making the word of God a perpetual uneasiness to them. They make the word of God a burden to themselves, and then quarrel with the ministers for making it a burden to them. Thus the scoffers of the latter days, while they slight heaven and salvation, reproach faithful ministers for preaching hell and damnation. Upon the whole we may observe that, how light soever men may make of it, the great God takes notice of, and is much displeased with, those who burlesque sacred things, and who, that they may make a jest of scripture truths and laws, put jests upon scripture language. In such wit as this I am sure there is no wisdom, and so it will appear at last. *Be you not mockers, lest your bands be made strong.* Those that were here guilty of this sin were some of the false prophets, who perhaps came to steal the word of God from the true prophets, some of the priests, who perhaps came to seek occasions against them on which to ground an information, and some of the people, who had learned of the profane priests and prophets to play with the things of God. The people would not have affronted the prophet and his God thus if the priests and the prophets, those ringleaders of mischief, had not shown them the way.

II. When they are reproofed for this profane way of speaking they are directed how to express themselves more decently. We do not find that the prophets are directed to make no more use of this word; we find it used long after this (Zech. ix. 1; Mal. i. 1; Nah. i. 1; Hab. i. 1); and we do not find it once used in this sense by Jeremiah either before or after. It is true indeed that in many cases it is advisable to make no use of such words and things as some have made a bad use of, and it may be prudent to avoid such phrases as, though innocent enough, are in danger of being perverted and made stumbling-blocks. But here God will have the prophet keep to his rule (*ch. xv. 19*), *Let them return unto thee, but return not thou unto them.* Do not thou leave off using this word, but let them leave off abusing it. *You shall not mention the burden of the Lord any more in this profane careless manner (v. 36), for it is perverting the words of the living God and making a bad use of them, which is an impious dangerous thing; for, consider, he is the Lord of hosts our God.* Note, If we will but look upon God as we ought to do in his greatness and goodness, and be but duly

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sensible of our relation and obligation to him, it may be hoped that we shall not dare to affront him by making a jest of his words. It is an impudent thing to abuse him that is the *living God*, the *Lord of hosts*, and *our God*. How then must they express themselves? He tells them (v. 37): *Thus shalt thou say to the prophet, when thou art enquiring of him, What hath the Lord answered thee? And what hath the Lord spoken? And they must say thus when they enquire of their neighbours, v. 35.* Note, We must always speak of the things of God reverently and seriously, and as becomes the oracles of God. It is a commendable practice to enquire after the mind of God, to enquire of our brethren what they have heard, to enquire of our prophets what they have to say from God; but then, to show that we enquire for a right end, we must do it after a right manner. Ministers may learn here, when they reprove people for what they say and do amiss, to teach them how to say and do better.

III. Because they would not leave off this bad way of speaking, though they were admonished of it, God threatens them here with utter ruin. They would still say, *The burden of the Lord*, though God had sent to them to forbid them, v. 38. What little regard have those to the divine authority that will not be persuaded by it to leave an idle word! But see what will come of it. 1. *Those shall be severely reckoned with that thus pervert the words of God*, that put a wrong construction on them and make a bad use of them; and it shall be made to appear that it is a great provocation to God to mock his messengers: *I will even punish that man and his house*; whether he be prophet or priest, or one of the common people, it shall be visited upon him, v. 34. Perverting God's word, and ridiculing the preachers of it, are sins that bring ruining judgments upon families and entail a curse upon a house. Another threatening we have v. 36: *Every man's word shall be his own burden*; that is, the guilt of this sin shall be so heavy upon him as to sink him into the pit of destruction. *God shall make their own tongue to fall upon them*, Ps. lxiv. 8. God will give them enough of their jest, so that *the burden of the Lord* they shall have no heart to mention any more; it will be too heavy to make a jest of. They are as *the madman that casts firebrands, arrows, and death*, while they pretend to be in sport. 2. The words of God, though thus perverted, shall be accomplished. Do they ask, *What is the burden of the Lord?* Let the prophet ask them, *What burden do you mean?* Is it this: *I will even forsake you?* v. 33. This is the burden that shall be laid and bound upon them (v. 39, 40): *"Behold I, even I, will utterly forget you, and I will forsake you. I will leave you, and have no thoughts of returning to you."* Those are miserable indeed that are forsaken and for-

gotten of God; and men's bantering God's judgments will not baffle them. Jerusalem was the city God had taken to himself as a holy city, and then *given to them and their fathers*; but that shall now be forsaken and forgotten. God had taken them to be a people near to him; but they shall now be *cast out of his presence*. They had been great and honourable among the nations; but now God will bring upon them an *everlasting reproach and a perpetual shame*. Both their sin and their punishment shall be their lasting disgrace. It is here upon record, to their infamy, and will remain so to the world's end. Note, God's word will be magnified and made honourable when those that mock at it shall be vilified and made contemptible. *Those that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.*

CHAP. XXIV.

In the close of the foregoing chapter we had a general prediction of the utter ruin of Jerusalem, that it should be forsaken and forgotten, which, whatever effect it had upon others, we have reason to think made the prophet himself very melancholy. Now, in this chapter, God encourages him, by showing him that, though the desolation seemed to be universal, yet all were not equally involved in it, but God knew how to distinguish, how to separate, between the precious and the vile. Some had gone into captivity already with Jeconiah; over them Jeremiah lamented, but God tells him that it should turn to their good. Others yet remained hardened in their sins, against whom Jeremiah had a just indignation; but those, God tells him, should go into captivity, and it should prove to their hurt. To inform the prophet of this, and affect him with it, here is, I. A vision of two baskets of figs, one very good and the other very bad, ver. 1—3. II. The explication of this vision, applying the good figs to those that were already sent into captivity for their good (ver. 4—7), the bad figs to those that should hereafter be sent into captivity for their hurt, ver. 8—10.

**T**HE LORD showed me, and, behold, two baskets of figs were set before the temple of the LORD, after that Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon had carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, and the princes of Judah, with the carpenters and smiths, from Jerusalem, and had brought them to Babylon. 2 One basket had very good figs, *even* like the figs that are first ripe: and the other basket had very naughty figs, which could not be eaten, they were so bad. 3 Then said the LORD unto me, What seest thou, Jeremiah? And I said, Figs; the good figs, very good; and the evil, very evil, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil. 4 Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 5 Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for *their* good. 6 For I will set mine eyes upon them for good,

and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull *them* down; and I will plant them, and not pluck *them* up. 7 And I will give them a heart to know me, that I *am* the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart. 8 And as the evil figs, which cannot be eaten, they are so evil; surely thus saith the LORD, So will I give Zedekiah the king of Judah, and his princes, and the residue of Jerusalem, that remain in this land, and them that dwell in the land of Egypt: 9 And I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for *their* hurt, to be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither I shall drive them. 10 And I will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, among them, till they be consumed from off the land that I gave unto them and to their fathers.

This short chapter helps us to put a very comfortable construction upon a great many long ones, by showing us that the same providence which to some is a *savour of death unto death* may by the grace and blessing of God be made to others a *savour of life unto life*; and that, though God's people share with others in the same calamity, yet it is not the same to them that it is to others, but is designed for their good and shall issue in their good; to them it is a correcting rod in the hand of a tender Father, while to others it is an avenging sword in the hand of a righteous Judge. Observe,

I. The date of this sermon. It was after, a little after, Jeconiah's captivity, v. 1. Jeconiah was himself a *despised broken vessel*, but with him were carried away some very valuable persons, Ezekiel for one (Ezek. i. 12); many of the *princes of Judah* then went into captivity, Daniel and his fellows were carried off a little before; of the people only *the carpenters and the smiths* were forced away, either because the Chaldeans needed some ingenious men of those trades (they had a great plenty of astrologers and stargazers, but a great scarcity of smiths and carpenters) or because the Jews would severely feel the loss of them, and would, for want of them, be unable to fortify their cities and furnish themselves with weapons of war. Now, it should seem, there were many good people carried away in that captivity, which the pious prophet laid much to heart, while there were those that triumphed in it, and



insulted over those to whose lot it fell to go into captivity. Note, We must not conclude concerning the first and greatest sufferers that they were the worst and greatest sinners; for perhaps it may appear quite otherwise, as it did here.

II. The vision by which this distinction of the captives was represented to the prophet's mind. He saw *two baskets of figs, set before the temple*, there ready to be offered as first-fruits to the honour of God. Perhaps the priests, being remiss in their duty, were not ready to receive them and dispose of them according to the law, and therefore Jeremiah sees them standing *before the temple*. But that which was the significance of the vision was that the figs in one basket were extraordinarily good, those in the other basket extremely bad. The children of men are all as the fruits of the fig-tree, capable of being made serviceable to God and man (Judg. ix. 11); but some are as good figs, than which nothing is more pleasant, others as damaged rotten figs, than which nothing is more nauseous. What creature viler than a wicked man, and what more valuable than a godly man! The good figs were like those that are first ripe, which are most acceptable (Mic. vii. 1) and most prized when newly come into season. The bad figs are such as could *not be eaten, they were so evil*; they could not answer the end of their creation, were neither pleasant nor good for food; and what then were they good for? If God has no honour from men, nor their generation any service, they are even like the bad figs, that cannot be eaten, that will not answer any good purpose. *If the salt have lost its savour, it is thenceforth fit for nothing but the dunghill*. Of the persons that are presented to the Lord at the door of his tabernacle, some are sincere, and they are very good; others dissemble with God, and they are very bad. Sinners are the worst of men, hypocrites the worst of sinners. *Corruptio optimi est pessima—That which is best becomes, when corrupted, the worst*.

III. The exposition and application of this vision. God intended by it to raise the dejected spirit of those that had gone into captivity, by assuring them of a happy return, and to humble and awaken the proud and secure spirits of those who continued yet in Jerusalem, by assuring them of a miserable captivity.

1. Here is the moral of the good figs, that were very good, the first ripe. These represented the pious captives, that seemed first ripe for ruin, for they went first into captivity, but should prove first ripe for mercy, and their captivity should help to ripen them; these are pleasing to God, as good figs are to us, and shall be carefully preserved for use. Now observe here,

(1.) Those that were already carried into captivity were the good figs that God would own. This shows, [1.] That we cannot de-

termine of God's love or hatred by all that is before us. When God's judgments are abroad those are not always the worst that are first seized by them. [2.] That early suffering sometimes proves for the best to us. The sooner the child is corrected the better effect the correction is likely to have. Those that went first into captivity were as the son whom the father loves, and chastens betimes, chastens while there is hope; and it did well. But those that staid behind were like a child long left to himself, who, when afterwards corrected, is stubborn, and made worse by it, Lam. iii. 27.

(2.) God owns their captivity to be his doing. Whoever were the instruments of it, he ordered and directed it (v. 5): *I have sent them out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans*. It is God that puts his gold into the furnace, to be tried; his hand is, in a special manner, to be eyed in the afflictions of good people. The judge orders the malefactor into the hand of an executioner, but the father corrects the child with his own hand.

(3.) Even this disgraceful uncomfortable captivity God intended for their benefit; and we are sure that his intentions are never frustrated: *I have sent them into the land of the Chaldeans for their good*. It seemed to be every way for their hurt, not only as it was the ruin of their estates, honours, and liberties, separated them from their relations and friends, and put them under the power of their enemies and oppressors, but as it sunk their spirits, discouraged their faith, deprived them of the benefit of God's oracles and ordinances, and exposed them to temptations; and yet it was designed for their good, and proved so, in the issue, as to many of them. *Out of the eater came forth meat*. By their afflictions they were convinced of sin, humbled under the hand of God, weaned from the world, made serious, taught to pray, and turned from their iniquity; particularly they were cured of their inclination to idolatry; and thus it was good for them that they were afflicted, Ps. cxix. 67, 71.

(4.) God promises them that he will own them in their captivity. Though they seem abandoned, they shall be acknowledged; the scornful relations they left behind will scarcely own them, or their kindred to them, but God says, *I will acknowledge them*. Note, *The Lord knows those that are his*, and will own them in all conditions; nakedness and sword shall not separate them from his love.

(5.) God assures them of his protection in their trouble, and a glorious deliverance out of it in due time, v. 6. Being sent into captivity for their good, they shall not be lost there; but it shall be with them as it is with gold which the refiner puts into the furnace. [1.] He has his eye upon it while it is there, and it is a careful eye, to see that it sustain no damage: "I will set my eyes upon them for good, to order every thing for the best,"

that all the circumstances of the affliction may concur to the answering of the great intention of it." [2.] He will be sure to take it out of the furnace again as soon as the work designed upon it is done: *I will bring them again to this land.* They were sent abroad for improvement awhile, under a severe discipline; but they shall be fetched back, when they have gone through their trial there, to their Father's house. [3.] He will fashion his gold when he has refined it, will make it a vessel of honour fit for his use; so, when God has brought them back from their trial, he *will build them* and make them a habitation for himself, will *plant them* and make them a vineyard for himself. Their captivity was to square the rough stones and make them fit for his building, to prune up the young trees and make them fit for his planting.

(6.) He engages to prepare them for these temporal mercies which he designed for them by bestowing spiritual mercies upon them, v. 7. It is this that will make their captivity be for their good; this shall be both the improvement of their affliction and their qualification for deliverance. When our troubles are sanctified to us, then we may be sure that they will end well. Now that which is promised is, [1.] That they should be better acquainted with God; they should learn more of God by his providences in Babylon than they had learned by all his oracles and ordinances in Jerusalem, thanks to divine grace, for, if that had not wrought mightily upon them in Babylon, they would for ever have forgotten God. It is here promised, *I will give them*, not so much a head to know me, but a *heart to know me*, for the right knowledge of God consists not in notion and speculation, but in the convictions of the practical judgment directing and governing the will and affections. *A good understanding have all those that do his commandments*, Ps. cxi. 10. Where God gives a sincere desire and inclination to know him he will give that knowledge. It is God himself that gives a heart to know him, else we should perish for ever in our ignorance. [2.] That they should be entirely converted to God, to his will as their rule, his service as their business, and his glory as their end: *They shall return to me with their whole heart.* God himself undertakes for them that they shall; and, if he turn us, we shall be turned. This follows upon the former; for those that have a heart to know God aright will not only turn to him, but turn with their whole heart; for those that are either obstinate in their rebellion, or hypocritical in their religion, may truly be said to be ignorant of God. [3.] That thus they should be again taken into covenant with God, as much to their comfort as ever: *They shall be my people, and I will be their God.* God will own them, as formerly, for his people, in the discoveries of himself to them, in his accept-

ance of their services, and in his gracious appearances on their behalf; and they shall have liberty to own him for their God in their prayers to him and their expectations from him. Note, Those that have backslidden from God, if they do in sincerity return to him, are admitted as freely as any to all the privileges and comforts of the everlasting covenant, which is herein well-ordered, that every transgression in the covenant does not throw us out of covenant, and that afflictions are not only consistent with, but flowing from, covenant-love.

2. Here is the moral of the bad figs. *Zedekiah and his princes and partizans yet remain in the land*, proud and secure enough, Ezek. xi. 3. Many had fled into Egypt for shelter, and they thought they had shifted well for themselves and their own safety, and boasted that though therein they had gone contrary to the command of God yet they had acted prudently for themselves. Now as to both these, that looked so scornfully upon those that had gone into captivity, it is here threatened, (1.) That, whereas those who were already carried away were settled in one country, where they had the comfort of one another's society, though in captivity, these should be dispersed and *removed into all the kingdoms of the earth*, where they should have no joy one of another. (2.) That, whereas those were carried captives for their good, these should be removed into all countries *for their hurt*. Their afflictions should be so far from humbling them that they should harden them, not bring them nearer to God, but set them at a greater distance from him. (3.) That, whereas those should have the honour of being owned of God in their troubles, these should have the shame of being abandoned by all mankind: *In all places whither I shall drive them they shall be a reproach and a proverb.* "Such a one is as false and proud as a Jew"—"Such a one is as poor and miserable as a Jew." All their neighbours shall make a jest of them, and of the calamities brought upon them. (4.) That, whereas those should *return to their own land*, these should be *consumed from that land*, never to see it more, and it shall be of no avail to them to plead that it was the land God gave to their fathers, for they had it from God, and he gave it to them upon condition of their obedience. (5.) That, whereas those were reserved for better times, these were reserved for worse; wherever they are removed *the sword, and famine, and pestilence*, shall be sent after them, shall soon overtake them, and, coming with commission so to do, shall overcome them. God has variety of judgments wherewith to prosecute those that fly from justice; and those that have escaped one may expect another, till they are brought to repent and reform.

Doubtless this prophecy had its accomplishment in the men of that generation;



yet, because we read not of any such remarkable difference between those of Jehoiakim's captivity and those of Zedekiah's, it is probable that this has a typical reference to the last destruction of the Jews by the Romans, in which those of them that believed were taken care of, but those that continued obstinate in unbelief were driven into all countries for a *taunt and a curse*, and so they remain to this day.

CHAP. XXV.

The prophecy of this chapter bears date some time before those prophecies in the chapters sent foregoing, for they are not placed in the exact order of time in which they were delivered. This is dated in the first year of Nebuchadrezzar, that remarkable year when the sword of the Lord began to be drawn and furnished. Here is, I. A review of the prophecies that had been delivered to Judah and Jerusalem for many years past, by Jeremiah himself and other prophets, with the little regard given to them and the little success of them, ver. 1-7. II. A very express threatening of the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem, by the king of Babylon, for their contempt of God, and their continuance in sin (ver. 8-11), to which is annexed a promise of their deliverance out of their captivity in Babylon, after 70 years, ver. 12-14. III. A prediction of the devastation of divers other nations about, by Nebuchadrezzar, represented by a "cup of fury" put into their hands (ver. 15-28), by a sword sent among them (ver. 29-33), and a desolation made among the shepherds and their flocks and pastures (ver. 34-38); so that we have here judgment beginning at the house of God, but not ending there.

**T**HE word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, that *was* the first year of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon; 2 The which Jeremiah the prophet spake unto all the people of Judah, and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, 3 From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon king of Judah, even unto this day, that *is* the three and twentieth year, the word of the LORD hath come unto me, and I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but ye have not hearkened. 4 And the LORD hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising early and sending *them*; but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear. 5 They said, Turn ye again now every one from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings, and dwell in the land that the LORD hath given unto you and to your fathers for ever and ever: 6 And go not after other gods to serve them, and to worship them, and provoke me not to anger with the works of your hands; and I will do you no hurt. 7 Yet ye have not hearkened unto me, saith the LORD; that ye might provoke me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt.

We have here a message from God con-

cerning all the people of Judah (v. 1), which Jeremiah delivered, in his name, unto all the people of Judah, v. 2. Note, That which is of universal concern ought to be of universal cognizance. It is fit that the word which concerns all the people, as the word of God does, the word of the gospel particularly, should be divulged to all in general, and, as far as may be, addressed to each in particular. Jeremiah had been sent to the *house of the king* (ch. xxii. 1), and he took courage to deliver his message there; here he is sent to *all the people*, and he takes the pains to deliver his message to them, probably when they had all come up to Jerusalem to worship at one of the solemn feasts; then he had them together, and it was to be hoped then, if ever, they would be well disposed to hear counsel and receive instruction.

This prophecy is dated in the fourth year of Jehoiakim and the first of Nebuchadrezzar. It was in the latter end of Jehoiakim's third year that Nebuchadrezzar began to reign by himself alone (having reigned some time before in conjunction with his father), as appears, Dan. i. 1. But Jehoiakim's fourth year was begun before Nebuchadrezzar's first was completed. Now that that active, daring, martial prince began to set up for the world's master, God, by his prophet, gives notice that he is his servant, and intimates what work he intends to employ him in, that his growing greatness, which was so formidable to the nations, might not be construed as any reflection upon the power and providence of God in the government of the world. Nebuchadrezzar should not bid so fair for universal monarchy (I should have said universal tyranny) but that God had purposes of his own to serve by him, in the execution of which the world shall see the meaning of God's permitting and ordering a thing that seemed such a reflection on his sovereignty and goodness.

Now in this message we may observe the great pains that had been taken with the people to bring them to repentance, which they are here put in mind of, as an aggravation of their sin and a justification of God in his proceedings against them.

I. Jeremiah, for his part, had been a constant preacher among them twenty-three years; he began in the thirteenth year of Josiah, who reigned thirty-one years, so that he prophesied about eighteen or nineteen years in his reign, then in the reign of Jehoahaz, and now four years of Jehoiakim's reign. Note, God keeps an account, whether we do or no, how long we have enjoyed the means of grace; and the longer we have enjoyed them the heavier will our account be if we have not improved them. *These three years (these three and twenty years) have I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree* All this while 1. God had been constant in

sending messages to them, as there was occasion for them: "From that time to this very day the word of the Lord has come unto me, for your use." Though they had the substance of the warning sent them already in the books of Moses, yet, because those were not duly regarded and applied, God sent to enforce them and make them more particular, that they might be without excuse. Thus God's Spirit was striving with them, as with the old world, Gen. vi. 3. 2. Jeremiah had been faithful and industrious in delivering those messages. He could appeal to themselves, as well as to God and his own conscience, concerning this: *I have spoken to you, rising early and speaking.* He had declared to them the whole counsel of God; he had taken a great deal of care and pains to discharge his trust in such a manner as might be most likely to win and work upon them. What men are solicitous about and intent upon they rise up early to prosecute. It intimates that his head was so full of thoughts about it, and his heart so intent upon doing good, that it broke his sleep, and made him get up betimes to project which way he might take that would be most likely to do them good. He rose early, both because he would lose no time and because he would lay hold on and improve the best time to work upon them, when, if ever, they were sober and sedate. Christ came early in the morning to preach in the temple, and the people as early to hear him, Luke xxi. 38. Morning lectures have their advantages. *My voice shalt thou hear in the morning.*

II. Besides him, God had sent them other prophets, on the same errand, v. 4. Of the writing prophets Micah, Nahum, and Habakkuk, were a little before him, and Zephaniah contemporary with him. But, besides those, there were many other of God's servants the prophets who preached awakening sermons, which were never published. And here God himself is said to rise early and send them, intimating how much his heart also was upon it, that this people should turn and live, and not go on and die, Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

III. All the messages sent them were to the purpose, and much to the same purpose, v. 5, 6. 1. They all told them of their faults, *their evil way*, and the *evil of their doings*. Those were not of God's sending who flattered them as if there were nothing amiss among them. 2. They all reproved them particularly for their idolatry, as a sin that was in a special manner provoking to God, *their going after other gods, to serve them and to worship them*, gods that were the work of their own hands. 3. They all called on them to repent of their sins and to reform their lives. This was the burden of every song, *Turn you now every one from his evil way.* Note, Personal and particular reformation must be insisted on as necessary to a national deliverance: *every one must*

*turn from his own evil way.* The street will not be clean unless every one sweep before his own door. 4. They all assured them that, if they did so, it would certainly be the *lengthening out of their tranquillity.* The mercies they enjoyed should be continued to them: "*You shall dwell in the land, dwell at ease, dwell in peace, in this good land, which the Lord has given you and your fathers.*" Nothing but sin will turn you out of it, and that shall not if you turn from it." The judgments they feared should be prevented: *Provoke me not, and I will do you no hurt.* Note, We should never receive from God the evil of punishment if we did not provoke him by the evil of sin. God deals fairly with us, never corrects his children without cause, nor causes grief to us unless we give offence to him.

IV. Yet all was to no purpose. They were not wrought upon to take the right and only method to turn away the wrath of God. Jeremiah was a very lively affectionate preacher, yet *they hearkened not* to him, v. 3. The other prophets dealt faithfully with them, but neither did they *hearken to them*, nor *incline their ear*, v. 4. That very particular sin which they were told, of all others, was most offensive to God, and made them obnoxious to his justice, they wilfully persisted in: *You provoke me with the works of your hands to your own hurt.* Note, What is a provocation to God will prove, in the end, hurt to ourselves, and we must bear the blame of it. *O Israel! thou hast destroyed thyself.*

8 Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Because ye have not heard my words, 9 Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the LORD, and Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and a hissing, and perpetual desolations. 10 Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the candle. 11 And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. 12 And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their



iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations. 13 And I will bring upon that land all my words which I have pronounced against it, *even* all that is written in this book, which Jeremiah hath prophesied against all the nations. 14 For many nations and great kings shall serve themselves of them also: and I will recompense them according to their deeds, and according to the works of their own hands.

Here is the sentence grounded upon the foregoing charge: "*Because you have not heard my words*, I must take another course with you," v. 8. Note, When men will not regard the judgments of God's mouth they may expect to feel the judgments of his hands, to hear the rod, since they would not hear the word; for the sinner must either be parted from his sin or perish in it. Wrath comes without remedy against those only that sin without repentance. It is not so much men's turning aside that ruins them as their not returning.

I. The ruin of the land of Judah by the king of Babylon's armies is here decreed, v. 9. God sent to them *his servants the prophets*, and they were not heeded, and therefore God will send for *his servant the king of Babylon*, whom they cannot mock, and despise, and persecute, as they did his servants the prophets. Note, The messengers of God's wrath will be sent against those that would not receive the messengers of his mercy. One way or other God will be heeded, and will make men know that *he is the Lord*. Nebuchadrezzar, though a stranger to the true God, the God of Israel, nay, an enemy to him and afterwards a rival with him, was yet, in the descent he made upon this country, *God's servant*, accomplished his purpose, was employed by him, and was an instrument in his hand for the correction of his people. He was really serving God's designs when he thought he was serving his own ends. Justly therefore does God here call himself *The Lord of hosts* (v. 8), for here is an instance of his sovereign dominion, not only over the inhabitants, but over the armies of this earth, of which he makes what use he pleases. He has them all at his command. The most potent and absolute monarchs are his servants. Nebuchadrezzar, who is an instrument of his wrath, is as truly his servant as Cyrus, who is an instrument of his mercy. The land of Judah being to be made desolate, God here musters his army that is to make it so, gathers it together, takes *all the families of the north*, if there be occasion for them, leads them on as their commander-in-chief, *brings them against this land*, gives

them success, not only against Judah and Jerusalem, but against *all the nations round about*, that there might be no dependence upon them as allies or assistants against that threatening force. The utter destruction of this and all the neighbouring lands is here described, v. 9—11. It shall be total: *The whole land shall be a desolation*, not only desolate, but a desolation itself; both city and country shall be laid waste, and all the wealth of both be made a prey of. It shall be lasting, even *perpetual desolations*; they shall continue so long in ruins, and after long waiting there shall appear so little prospect of relief, that every one shall call it perpetual. This desolation shall be the ruin of their credit among their neighbours; it shall bury their honour in the dust, shall *make them an astonishment and a hissing*; every one will be amazed at them, and hiss them off the stage of action with just disgrace for deserting a God who would have been their protection for impostors who would certainly be their destruction. It will likewise be the ruin of all their comfort among themselves; it shall be a final period of all their joy: *I will take from them the voice of mirth*, hang their harps on the willow-trees, and put them out of tune for songs. *I will take from them the voice of mirth*; they shall neither have cause for it nor hearts for it. They would not hear the voice of God's word and therefore the voice of mirth shall no more be heard among them. They shall be deprived of food: *The sound of the mill-stones shall not be heard*; for, when the enemy has seized their stores, the sound of the grinding must needs be low, Eccl. xii. 4. An end shall be put to all business; there shall not be seen *the light of a candle*, for there shall be no work to be done worth candle-light. And, *lastly*, they shall be deprived of their liberty: *Those nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years*. The fixing of the time during which the captivity should last would be of great use, not only for the confirmation of the prophecy, when the event (which in this particular could by no human sagacity be foreseen) should exactly answer the prediction, but for the comfort of the people of God in their calamity and the encouragement of faith and prayer. Daniel, who was himself a prophet, had an eye to it, Dan. ix. 2. Nay, God himself had an eye to it (2 Chron. xxxvi. 22); for *therefore he stirred up the spirit of Cyrus*, that the word spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished. *Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world*, which appears by this, that, when he has thought fit, some of them have been made known to his servants the prophets and by them to his church.

II. The ruin of Babylon, at last, is here likewise foretold, as it had been, long before, by Isaiah, v. 12—14. The destroyers must themselves be destroyed, and the rod thrown

into the fire, when the correcting work is done with it. This shall be done when *seventy years are accomplished*; for the destruction of Babylon must make way for the deliverance of the captives. It is a great doubt when these *seventy years* commence; some date them from the captivity in the fourth year of Jehoiakim and first of Nebuchadrezzar, others from the captivity of Jehoiachin eight years after. I rather incline to the former, because then these nations began to serve the king of Babylon, and because usually God has taken the earliest time from which to reckon the accomplishment of a promise of mercy, as will appear in computing the 400 years' servitude in Egypt. And, if so, eighteen or nineteen years of the seventy had run out before Jerusalem and the temple were quite destroyed in the eleventh year of Zedekiah. However that be, when the time, the set time, to favour Zion, has come, the king of Babylon must be visited, and all the instances of his tyranny reckoned for; then that nation shall be punished for their iniquity, as the other nations have been punished for theirs. That land must then be a perpetual desolation, such as they had made other lands; for the Judge of all the earth will both do right and avenge wrong, as King of nations and King of saints. Let proud conquerors and oppressors be moderate in the use of their power and success, for it will come at last to their own turn to suffer; their day will come to fall. In this destruction of Babylon, which was to be brought about by the Medes and Persians, reference shall be had, 1. To what God had said: *I will bring upon that land all my words*; for all the wealth and honour of Babylon shall be sacrificed to the truth of the divine predictions, and all its power broken, rather than one iota or tittle of God's word shall fall to the ground. The same Jeremiah that prophesied the destruction of other nations by the Chaldeans foretold also the destruction of the Chaldeans themselves; and this must be brought upon them, v. 13. It is with reference to this very event that God says, *I will confirm the word of my servant, and perform the counsel of my messengers*, Isa. xlv. 26. 2. To what they had done (v. 14): *I will recompense them according to their deeds*, by which they transgressed the law of God, even then when they were made to serve his purposes. They had made many nations to serve them, and trampled upon them with the greatest insolence imaginable; but now that the measure of their iniquity is full many nations and great kings, that are in alliance with and come in to the assistance of Cyrus king of Persia, shall serve themselves of them also, shall make themselves masters of their country, enrich themselves with their spoils, and make them the footstool by which to mount the throne of universal monarchy. They shall make use of them for servants and

soldiers. *He that leads into captivity shall go into captivity.*

15 For thus saith the LORD God of Israel unto me; Take the wine cup of this fury at my hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send thee, to drink it. 16 And they shall drink, and be moved, and be mad, because of the sword that I will send among them. 17 Then took I the cup at the LORD's hand, and made all the nations to drink, unto whom the LORD had sent me: 18 *To wit*, Jerusalem, and the cities of Judah, and the kings thereof, and the princes thereof, to make them a desolation, an astonishment, a hissing, and a curse; as it is this day; 19 Pharaoh king of Egypt, and his servants, and his princes, and all his people; 20 And all the mingled people, and all the kings of the land of Uz, and all the kings of the land of the Philistines, and Ashkelon, and Azzah, and Ekron, and the remnant of Ashdod, 21 Edom, and Moab, and the children of Ammon, 22 And all the kings of Tyrus, and all the kings of Zidon, and the kings of the isles which are beyond the sea, 23 Dedan, and Tema, and Buz, and all that are in the utmost corners, 24 And all the kings of Arabia, and all the kings of the mingled people that dwell in the desert, 25 And all the kings of Zimri, and all the kings of Elam, and all the kings of the Medes, 26 And all the kings of the north, far and near, one with another, and all the kingdoms of the world, which are upon the face of the earth: and the king of Sheshach shall drink after them. 27 Therefore thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Drink ye, and be drunken, and spue, and fall, and rise no more, because of the sword which I will send among you. 28 And it shall be, if they refuse to take the cup at thine hand to drink, then shalt thou say unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Ye shall certainly drink. 29 For, lo, I begin to bring evil on the city which is called by my name, and should ye



be utterly unpunished? Ye shall not be unpunished: for I will call for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth, saith the LORD of hosts.

Under the similitude of a cup going round, which all the company must drink of, is here represented the universal desolation that was now coming upon that part of the world which Nebuchadrezzar, who just now began to reign and act, was to be the instrument of, and which should at length recoil upon his own country. The cup in the vision is to be a sword in the accomplishment of it: so it is explained, *v. 16. It is the sword that I will send among them*, the sword of war, that should be irresistibly strong and implacably cruel.

I. As to the circumstances of this judgment, observe,

1. Whence this destroying sword should come—from *the hand of God*. It is the sword of the Lord (*ch. xlvii. 6*), *bathed in heaven*, Isa. xxxiv. 5. Wicked men are made use of as his sword, Ps. xvii. 13. It is the *wine-cup of his fury*. It is the just anger of God that sends this judgment. The nations have provoked him by their sins, and they must fall under the tokens of his wrath. These are compared to some intoxicating liquor, which they shall be forced to drink of, as, formerly, condemned malefactors were sometimes executed by being compelled to drink poison. The wicked are said to *drink the wrath of the Almighty*, Job xxi. 20; Rev. xiv. 10. Their share of troubles in his world is represented by the dregs of a cup of red wine full of mixture, Ps. lxxv. 8. See Ps. xi. 6. The wrath of God in this world is but as a cup, in comparison of the full streams of it in the other world.

2. By whose hand it should be sent to them—by the hand of Jeremiah as the judge *set over the nations* (*ch. i. 10*), to pass his sentence upon them, and by the hand of Nebuchadrezzar as the executioner. What a much greater figure then does the poor prophet make than what the potent prince makes, if we look upon their relation to God, though in the eye of the world it was the reverse of it! Jeremiah must *take the cup at God's hand*, and compel the nations to *drink it*. He foretels no hurt to them but what God appoints him to foretel; and what is foretold by a divine authority will certainly be fulfilled by a divine power.

3. On whom it should be sent—on all the nations within the verge of Israel's acquaintance and the lines of their communication. Jeremiah took the cup, and *made all the nations to drink of it*, that is, he prophesied concerning each of the nations here mentioned that they should share in this great desolation that was coming. *Jerusalem and the cities of Judah* are put first (*v. 18*); for *judgment begins at the house of God* (1 Pet. iv. 17), at the sanctuary, Ezek. ix. 6. Whe-

ther Nebuchadrezzar had his eye principally upon Jerusalem and Judah in this expedition or no does not appear; probably he had; for it was as considerable as any of the nations here mentioned. However God had his eye principally to them. And this part of the prophecy was already begun to be accomplished; this is denoted by that melancholy parenthesis (*as it is this day*), for in the fourth year of Jehoiakim things had come into a very bad posture, and all the foundations were out of course. *Pharaoh king of Egypt* comes next, because the Jews trusted to that broken reed (*v. 19*); the remains of them fled to Egypt, and there Jeremiah particularly foretold the destruction of that country, *ch. xliii. 10, 11*. All the other nations that bordered upon Canaan must pledge Jerusalem in this bitter cup, this cup of trembling. The mingled people, the Arabians (so some), some rovers of divers nations that lived by rapine (so others); the *kings of the land of Uz*, joined to the country of the Edomites. The Philistines had been vexatious to Israel, but now their cities and their lords become a prey to this mighty conqueror. Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Zidon, are places well known to border upon Israel; the *Isles beyond, or beside, the sea*, are supposed to be those parts of Phœnicia and Syria that lay upon the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Dedan and the other countries mentioned (*v. 23, 24*) seem to have lain upon the confines of Idumea and Arabia the desert. Those of Elam are the Persians, with whom the Medes are joined, now looked upon as inconsiderable and yet afterwards able to make reprisals upon Babylon for themselves and all their neighbours. The *kings of the north*, that lay nearer to Babylon, and others that lay at some distance, will be sure to be seized on and made a prey of by the victorious sword of Nebuchadrezzar. Nay, he shall push on his victories with such incredible fury and success that all the kingdoms of the world that were then and there known should become sacrifices to his ambition. Thus Alexander is said to have conquered *the world*, and the Roman empire is called *the world*, Luke ii. 1. Or it may be taken as reading the doom of *all the kingdoms* of the earth; one time or other, they shall feel the dreadful effects of war. The world has been, and will be, a great cockpit, while men's lusts war as they do in *their members*, Jam. iv. 1. But, that the conquerors may see their fate with the conquered, it concludes, *The king of Sheshach shall drink after them*, that is, the king of Babylon himself, who has given his neighbours all this trouble and vexation, shall at length have it return upon his own head. That by Sheshach is meant Babylon is plain from *ch. li. 41*; but whether it was another name of the same city or the name of another city of the same kingdom is uncertain. Babylon's ruin was foretold, *v. 12, 13*. Upon this pro-

phesy of its being the author of the ruin of so many nations it is very fitly repeated here again.

4. What should be the effect of it. The desolations which the sword should make in all these kingdoms are represented by the consequences of excessive drinking (v. 16): *They shall drink, and be moved, and be mad. They shall be drunken, and spue, and fall and rise no more*, v. 27. Now this may serve, (1.) To make us loathe the sin of drunkenness, that the consequences of it are made use of to set forth a most woeful and miserable condition. Drunkenness deprives men, for the present, of the use of their reason, makes them mad. It takes from them likewise that which, next to reason, is the most valuable blessing, and that is health; it makes them sick, and endangers the bones and the life. Men in drink often *fall and rise no more*; it is a sin that is its own punishment. How wretchedly are those intoxicated and besotted that suffer themselves at any time to be intoxicated, especially to be by the frequent commission of the sin besotted with wine or strong drink! (2.) To make us dread the judgments of war. When God sends the sword upon a nation, with warrant to make it desolate, it soon becomes like a drunken man, filled with confusion at the alarms of war, put into a hurry; its counsellors *mad*, and at their wits' end, staggering in all the measures they take, all the motions they make, sick at heart with continual vexation, *vomiting up the riches they have greedily swallowed down* (Job xx. 15), *falling down before the enemy*, and as unable to get up again, or do any thing to help themselves, as a man *dead drunk is*, Hab. ii. 16.

5. The undoubted certainty of it, with the reason given for it, v. 28, 29. They will *refuse to take the cup at thy hand*; not only they will be loth that the judgment should come, but they will be loth to believe that ever it will come; they will not give credit to the prediction of so despicable a man as Jeremiah. But he must tell them that it is *the word of the Lord of hosts*, he hath said it; and it is in vain for them to struggle with Omnipotence: *You shall certainly drink*. And he must give them this reason, It is a time of visitation, it is a reckoning day, and Jerusalem has been called to an account already: *I begin to bring evil on the city that is called by my name*; its relation to me will not exempt it from punishment, and *should you be utterly unpunished?* No; *If this be done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?* If those who have some good in them smart so severely for the evil that is found in them, can those expect to escape who have worse evils, and no good, found among them? If Jerusalem be punished for learning idolatry of the nations, shall not the nations be punished, of whom they

learned it? No doubt they shall: *I will call for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth*, for they have helped to debauch the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

II. Upon this whole matter we may observe, 1. That there is a God that judges in the earth, to whom all the nations of the earth are accountable, and by whose judgment they must abide. 2. That God can easily bring to ruin the greatest nations, the most numerous and powerful, and such as have been most secure. 3. That those who have been vexatious and mischievous to the people of God will be reckoned with for it at last. Many of these nations had in their turns given disturbance to Israel, but now comes destruction on them. The year of the redeemer will come, even the *year of recompenses* for the controversy of Zion. 4. That the *burden of the word of the Lord* will at last become the burden of his judgments. Isaiah had prophesied long since against most of these nations (*ch. xiii. &c.*) and now at length all his prophecies will have their complete fulfilling. 5. That those who are ambitious of power and dominion commonly become the troublers of the earth and the plagues of their generation. Nebuchadrezzar was so proud of his might that he had no sense of right. These are the men that turn the world upside down, and yet expect to be admired and adored. Alexander thought himself a great prince when others thought him no better than a great pirate. 6. That the greatest pomp and power in this world are of very uncertain continuance. Before Nebuchadrezzar's greater force kings themselves must yield and become captives.

30 Therefore prophecy thou against them all these words, and say unto them, The LORD shall roar from on high, and utter his voice from his holy habitation; he shall mightily roar upon his habitation; he shall give a shout, as they that tread *the grapes*, against all the inhabitants of the earth. 31 A noise shall come *even* to the ends of the earth; for the LORD hath a controversy with the nations, he will plead with all flesh; he will give them *that are* wicked to the sword, saith the LORD. 32 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Behold, evil shall go forth from nation to nation, and a great whirlwind shall be raised up from the coasts of the earth. 33 And the slain of the LORD shall be at that day from *one* end of the earth even unto the *other* end of the earth: they shall not be lamented, neither gathered, nor buried; they shall be



ding upon the ground. 34 Howl, ye shepherds, and cry; and wallow yourselves *in the ashes*, ye principal of the flock: for the days of your slaughter and of your dispersions are accomplished; and ye shall fall like a pleasant vessel. 35 And the shepherds shall have no way to flee, nor the principal of the flock to escape. 36 A voice of the cry of the shepherds, and a howling of the principal of the flock, *shall be heard*: for the LORD hath spoiled their pasture. 37 And the peaceable habitations are cut down because of the fierce anger of the LORD. 38 He hath forsaken his covert, as the lion: for their land is desolate because of the fierceness of the oppressor, and because of his fierce anger.

We have, in these verses, a further description of those terrible desolations which the king of Babylon with his armies should make in all the countries and nations round about Jerusalem. In Jerusalem God had erected his temple; there were his oracles and ordinances, which the neighbouring nations should have attended to and might have received benefit by; thither they should have applied for the knowledge of God and their duty, and then they might have had reason to bless God for their neighbourhood to Jerusalem; but they, instead of that, taking all opportunities either to debauch or to disturb that holy city, when God came to reckon with Jerusalem because it learned so much of the *way of the nations*, he reckoned with the nations because they learned so little of the way of Jerusalem.

They will soon be aware of Nebuchadrezzar's making war upon them; but the prophet is here directed to tell them that it is God himself that makes war upon them, a God with whom there is no contending. 1. The war is here proclaimed (v. 30): *The Lord shall roar from on high; not from Mount Zion and Jerusalem* (as Joel iii. 16, Amos i. 2), but *from heaven, from his holy habitation* there; for now Jerusalem is one of the places against which he roars. *He shall mightily roar upon his habitation* on earth from that above. He has been long silent, and seemed not to take notice of the wickedness of the nations; the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now *he shall give a shout*, as the assailants in battle do, *against all the inhabitants of the earth*, to whom it shall be a shout of terror, and yet a shout of joy in heaven, as theirs that *tread the grapes*; for, when God is reckoning with the proud enemies of his kingdom among men, there is a *great voice of much people*

*heard in heaven, saying, Hallelujah*, Rev. xix. 1. *He roars as a lion* (Amos iii. 4, 8), as a lion that has *forsaken his covert* (v. 38), and is going abroad to seek his prey, upon which he roars, that he may the more easily seize it. 2. The manifesto is here published, showing the causes and reasons why God proclaims this war (v. 31): *The Lord has a controversy with the nations*; he has just cause to contend with them, and he will take this way of pleading with them. His quarrel with them is, in one word, for their wickedness, their contempt of him, and his authority over them and kindness to them. *He will give those that are wicked to the sword*. They have provoked God to anger, and thence comes all this destruction; it is *because of the fierce anger of the Lord* (v. 37 and again v. 38), the *fierceness of the oppressor*, or (as it might better be read) the *fierceness of the oppressing sword* (for the word is feminine); is *because of his fierce anger*; and we are sure that he is never angry without cause; but *who knows the power of his anger*? 3. The alarm is here given and taken: *A noise will come even to the ends of the earth*, so loud shall it roar, so far shall it reach, v. 31. The alarm is not given by sound of trumpet, or beat of drum, but by a *whirlwind, a great whirlwind, storm, or tempest*, which shall be *raised up from the coasts*, the remote coasts of the earth, v. 32. The Chaldean army shall be like a hurricane raised in the north, but thence carried on with incredible fierceness and swiftness, bearing down all before it. It is like the whirlwind out of which God answered Job, which was exceedingly terrible, Job xxxvii. 1; xxxviii. 1. And, when the wrath of God thus roars like a lion from heaven, no marvel if it be echoed with shrieks from earth; for who can choose but tremble when God thus speaks in displeasure? See Hosea xi. 10. Now the shepherds shall *howl and cry*, the kings, and princes, and the great ones of the earth, the *principal of the flock*. They used to be the most courageous and secure, but now their hearts shall fail them; *they shall wallow themselves in the ashes*, v. 34. Seeing themselves utterly unable to make head against the enemy, and seeing their country, which they have the charge of and a concern for, inevitably ruined, they shall abandon themselves to sorrow. There shall be a *voice of the cry of the shepherds*, and a *howling of the principal of the flock shall be heard*, v. 36. Those are great calamities indeed that strike such a terror upon the great men, and put them into this consternation. *The Lord hath spoiled their pasture*, in which they fed their flock, and out of which they fed themselves; the spoiling of that makes them cry out thus. Perhaps, carrying on the metaphor of a lion roaring, it alludes to the great fright that shepherds are in when they hear a roaring lion coming towards their flocks, and find

they have *no way to flee* (v. 35) for their own safety, neither can the *principal of their flock escape*. The enemy will be so numerous, so furious, so sedulous, and the extent of their armies so vast, that it will be impossible to avoid falling into their hands. Note, As we cannot out-face, so we cannot out-run, the judgments of God. This is that for which the shepherds *howl and cry*. 4. The progress of this war is here described (v. 32): *Behold, evil shall go forth from nation to nation*; as the cup goes round, every nation shall have its share and take its turn, because one does not take warning by the calamities of another to repent and reform. Nay, as if this were to be a little representation of the last and general judgment, it shall reach *from one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth*, v. 33. The day of vengeance is in his heart, and now *his hand shall find out all his enemies*, wherever they are, Ps. xxi. 8. Note, When our neighbour's house is on fire it is time to be concerned for our own. When one nation is a seat of war every neighbouring nation should hear, and fear, and make its peace with God. 5. The dismal consequences of this war are here foretold: *The days of slaughter and dispersions are accomplished*, that is, they are fully come (v. 34), the time fixed in the divine counsel for the slaughter of some and the dispersion of the rest, which will make the nations completely desolate. Multitudes shall fall by the sword of the merciless Chaldeans, so that *the slain of the Lord* shall be every where found: they are slain by commission from him, and are sacrificed to his justice. The slain for sin are *the slain of the Lord*. To complete the misery of their slaughter, *they shall not be lamented* in particular, so general shall the matter of lamentation be. Nay, they shall not be gathered up, nor buried, for they shall have no friends left to bury them, and the enemies shall not have so much humanity in them as to do it; and then they shall be *as dung upon the earth*, so vile and noisome: and it is well if, as dung manures the earth and makes it fruitful, so these horrid spectacles, which lie as monuments of divine justice, might be a means to awaken the inhabitants of the earth to *learn righteousness*. The effect of this war will be the *desolation of the whole land* that is the seat of it (v. 38), one land after another. But here are two expressions more that seem to make the case in a particular manner piteous. (1.) *You shall fall like a pleasant vessel*, v. 34. The most desirable persons among them, who most valued themselves and were most valued, who were looked upon as *vessels of honour*, shall fall by the sword. You shall fall as a Venice glass or a China dish, which is soon broken all to pieces. Even the tender and delicate shall share in the common calamity; the sword devours one as well as another. (2.) *Even the peaceable habitations*

*are cut down*. Those that used to be quiet, and not molested, the habitations in which you have long dwelt in peace, shall now be no longer such, but *cut down* by the war. Or, Those who used to be quiet, and not molesting any of their neighbours, those who lived in peace, easily, and gave no provocation to any, even those shall not escape. This is one of the direful effects of war, that even those who were most harmless and inoffensive suffer hard things. Blessed be God, there is a *peaceable habitation* above for all the sons of peace, which is out of the reach of fire and sword.

## CHAP. XXVI.

As in the history of the Acts of the Apostles that of their preaching and that of their suffering are interwoven, so it is in the account we have of the prophet Jeremiah; witness this chapter, where we are told, I. How faithfully he preached, ver. 1—6. II. How spitefully he was persecuted for so doing by the priests and the prophets, ver. 7—11. III. How bravely he stood to his doctrine, in the face of his persecutors, ver. 12—15. IV. How wonderfully he was protected and delivered by the prudence of the princes and elders, ver. 16—19. Though Urijah, another prophet, was about the same time put to death by Jehoiakim (ver. 20—23), yet Jeremiah met with those that sheltered him, ver. 24.

**I**N the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah came this word from the LORD, saying, 2 Thus saith the LORD; Stand in the court of the LORD's house, and speak unto all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the LORD's house, all the words that I command thee to speak unto them; diminish not a word: 3 If so be they will hearken, and turn every man from his evil way, that I may repent me of the evil, which I purpose to do unto them because of the evil of their doings. 4 And thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the LORD; If ye will not hearken to me, to walk in my law, which I have set before you, 5 To hearken to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I sent unto you, both rising up early, and sending *them*, but ye have not hearkened; 6 Then will I make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth.

We have here the sermon that Jeremiah preached, which gave such offence that he was in danger of losing his life for it. It is here left upon record, as it were, by way of appeal to the judgment of impartial men in all ages, whether Jeremiah was worthy to die for delivering such a message as this from God, and whether his persecutors were not very wicked and unreasonable men.

I. God directed him where to preach this sermon, and when, and to what auditory,



v. 2. Let not any censure Jeremiah as indiscreet in the choice of place and time, nor say that he might have delivered his message more privately, in a corner, among his friends that he could confide in, and that he deserved to smart for not acting more cautiously; for God gave him orders to preach *in the court of the Lord's house*, which was within the peculiar jurisdiction of his sworn enemies the priests, and who would therefore take themselves to be in a particular manner affronted. He must preach this, as it should seem, at the time of one of the most solemn festivals, when persons had come from all the *cities of Judah to worship in the Lord's house*. These worshippers, we may suppose, had a great veneration for their priests, would credit the character they gave of men, and be exasperated against those whom they defamed, and would, consequently, side with them and strengthen their hands against Jeremiah. But none of these things must move him or daunt him; in the face of all this danger he must preach this sermon, which, if it were not convincing, would be very provoking. And because the prophet might be in some temptation to palliate the matter, and make it better to his hearers than God had made it to him, to exchange an offensive expression for one more plausible, therefore God charges him particularly *not to diminish a word*, but to speak all the things, nay, *all the words*, that he had commanded him. Note, God's ambassadors must keep closely to their instructions, and not in the least vary from them, either to please men or to save themselves from harm. They must neither *add* nor *diminish*, Deut. iv. 2.

II. God directed him what to preach, and it is that which could not give offence to any but such as were resolved to go on still in their trespasses. 1. He must assure them that if they would *repent of their sins*, and turn from them, though they were in imminent danger of ruin and desolating judgments were just at the door, yet a stop should be put to them, and God would proceed no further in his controversy with them, v. 3. This was the main thing God intended in sending him to them, to try if they would return from their sins, that so God might turn from his anger and turn away the judgments that threatened them, which he was not only willing, but very desirous to do, as soon as he could do it without prejudice to the honour of his justice and holiness. See how God *waits to be gracious*, waits till we are duly qualified, till we are fit for him to be gracious to, and in the mean time tries a variety of methods to bring us to be so. 2. He must, on the other hand, assure them that if they continued obstinate to all the calls God gave them, and would persist in their disobedience, it would certainly end in the ruin of their city and temple, v. 4—6. (1.) That which God re-

quired of them was that they should be obedient of what he had said to them, both by the written word and by his ministers, that they should *walk in all his law which he set before them*, the law of Moses and the ordinances and commandments of it, and that they should *hearken to the words of his servants the prophets*, who pressed nothing upon them but what was agreeable to the law of Moses, which was *set before them* as a touchstone to try the spirits by; and by this they were distinguished from the false prophets, who drew them from the law, instead of drawing them to it. The law was what God himself set before them. The prophets were his own servants, and were immediately sent by him to them, and sent with a great deal of care and concern, *rising early to send them*, lest they should come too late, when their prejudices had got possession and become invincible. They had hitherto been deaf both to the law and to the prophets: *You have not hearkened*. All he expects now is that at length they should heed what he said, and make his word their rule—a reasonable demand. (2.) That which is threatened in case of refusal is that this city, and the temple in it, shall fare as their predecessors did, Shiloh and the tabernacle there, for a like refusal to walk in God's law and hearken to his prophets, then when the present dispensation of prophecy just began in Samuel. Now could a sentence be expressed more unexceptionably? Is it not a rule of justice *ut parium par sit ratio*—that those whose cases are the same be dealt with alike? If Jerusalem be like Shiloh in respect of sin, why should it not be like Shiloh in respect of punishment? Can any other be expected? This was not the first time he had given them warning to this effect; see ch. vii. 12—14. When the temple, which was the glory of Jerusalem, was destroyed, the city was thereby *made a curse*; for the temple was that which made it a blessing. *If the salt lose that savour, it is thenceforth good for nothing*. It shall be a curse, that is, it shall be the pattern of a curse; if a man would curse any city, he would say, *God make it like Jerusalem!* Note, Those that will not be subject to the commands of God make themselves subject to the curse of God.

7 So the priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the LORD. 8 Now it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak unto all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die. 9 Why hast thou prophesied in the

name of the LORD, saying, This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate without an inhabitant? And all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the LORD. 10 When the princes of Judah heard these things, then they came up from the king's house unto the house of the LORD, and sat down in the entry of the new gate of the LORD's house. 11 Then spake the priests and the prophets unto the princes and to all the people, saying, This man is worthy to die; for he hath prophesied against this city, as ye have heard with your ears. 12 Then spake Jeremiah unto all the princes and to all the people, saying, The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that ye have heard. 13 Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God; and the LORD will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced against you. 14 As for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you. 15 But know ye for certain, that if ye put me to death, ye shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof: for of a truth the LORD hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears.

One would have hoped that such a sermon as that in the foregoing verses, so plain and practical, so rational and pathetic, and delivered in God's name, would work upon even this people, especially meeting them now at their devotions, and would prevail with them to repent and reform; but, instead of awakening their convictions, it did but exasperate their corruptions, as appears by this account of the effect of it.

1. Jeremiah is charged with it as a crime that he had preached such a sermon, and is apprehended for it as a criminal. The priests, and false prophets, and people, heard him speak these words, v. 7. They had patience, it seems, to hear him out, did not disturb him when he was preaching, nor give him any interruption till he had made an end of speaking all that the Lord commanded him to speak, v. 8. So far they dealt more fairly with him than some of the persecutors of God's ministers have done; they let him say all he had to say, and yet perhaps with a bad design, in hopes to have something worse

yet to lay to his charge; but, having no worse, this shall suffice to ground an indictment upon: He hath said, *This house shall be like Shiloh*, v. 9. See how unfair they are in representing his words. He had said, in God's name, *If you will not hearken to me, then will I make this house like Shiloh*; but they leave out God's hand in the desolation (*I will make it so*) and their own hand in it in not hearkening to the voice of God, and charge it upon him that he blasphemed *this holy place*, the crime charged both on our Lord Jesus and on Stephen: He said, *This house shall be like Shiloh*. Well might he complain, as David does (Ps. lvi. 5), *Every day they wrest my words*; and we must not think it strange if we, and what we say and do, be thus misrepresented. When the accusation was so weakly grounded, no marvel that the sentence passed upon it was unjust: *Thou shalt surely die*. What he had said agreed with what God had said when he took possession of the temple (1 Kings ix. 6—8), *If you shall at all turn from following after me, then this house shall be abandoned*; and yet he is condemned to die for saying it. It is not out of any concern for the honour of the temple that they appear thus warm, but because they are resolved not to part with their sins, in which they flatter themselves with a conceit that the temple of the Lord will protect them; therefore, right or wrong, *Thou shalt surely die*. This outcry of the priests and prophets raised the mob, and all the people were gathered together against Jeremiah in a popular tumult, ready to pull him to pieces, were gathered about him (so some read it); they flocked together, some crying one thing and some another. The people that were at first present were hot against him (v. 8), but their clamours drew more together, only to see what the matter was.

II. He is arraigned and indicted for it before the highest court of judicature they had. Here, 1. The princes of Judah were his judges, v. 10. Those that filled the thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David, the elders of Israel, they, hearing of this tumult in the temple, came up from the king's house, where they usually sat near the court, to the house of the Lord, to enquire into this matter, and to see that nothing was done disorderly. They sat down in the entry of the new gate of the Lord's house, and held a court, as it were, by a special commission of Oyer and Terminer. 2. The priests and prophets were his prosecutors and accusers, and were violently set against him. They appealed to the princes, and to all the people, to the court and the jury, whether this man were not worthy to die, v. 11. The corrupt priests and counterfeit prophets have always been the most bitter enemies of the prophets of the Lord; they had ends of their own to serve, which they thought such preaching as this would be an obstruc-



tion to. When Jeremiah prophesied in the house of the king concerning the fall of the royal family (*ch. xxii. 1, &c.*), the court, though very corrupt, bore it patiently, and we do not find that they persecuted him for it; but when he comes into the *house of the Lord*, and touches the copyhold of the priests, and contradicts the lies and flatteries of the false prophets, then he is adjudged *worthy to die*. For the prophets *prophesied falsely*, and the *priests bore rule by their means*, *ch. v. 31*. Observe, When Jeremiah is indicted before the princes the stress of his accusation is laid upon what he said concerning the city, because they thought the princes would be most concerned about that. But concerning the words spoken they appeal to the people, "*You have heard what he hath said; let it be given in evidence.*"

III. Jeremiah makes his defence before the princes and the people. He does not go about to deny the words, nor to diminish aught from them; what he has said he will stand to, though it cost him his life; he owns that he had prophesied against *this house and this city*, but, 1. He asserts that he did this by good authority, not maliciously nor seditiously, not out of any ill-will to his country nor any disaffection to the government in church or state, but, *The Lord sent me to prophesy thus*: so he begins his apology (*v. 12*), and so he concludes it, for this is that which he resolves to abide by as sufficient to bear him out (*v. 15*): *Of a truth the Lord hath sent me unto you, to speak all these words*. As long as ministers keep closely to the instructions they have from heaven they need not fear the opposition they may meet with from hell or earth. He pleads that he is but a messenger, and, if he faithfully deliver his message, he must bear no blame; but he is a messenger from the Lord, to whom they were accountable as well as he, and therefore might demand regard. If he speak but what God appointed him to speak, he is under the divine protection, and whatever affront they offer to the ambassador will be resented by the Prince that sent him. 2. He shows them that he did it with a good design, and that it was their fault if they did not make a good use of it. It was said, not by way of fatal sentence, but of fair warning; if they would take the warning, they might prevent the execution of the sentence, *v. 13*. Shall I take it ill of a man that tells me of my danger, while I have an opportunity of avoiding it, and not rather return him thanks for it, as the greatest kindness he could do me? "*I have indeed* (says Jeremiah) *prophesied against this city; but, if you will now amend your ways and your doings, the threatened ruin shall be prevented, which was the thing I aimed at in giving you the warning.*" Those are very unjust who complain of ministers for preaching hell and damnation, when it is only to keep them from that place of torment and to

bring them to heaven and salvation. 3. He therefore warns them of their danger if they proceed against him (*v. 14*): "*As for me, the matter is not great what becomes of me; behold, I am in your hand; you know I am; I neither have any power, nor can make any interest, to oppose you, nor is it so much my concern to save my own life: do with me as seems meet unto you; if I be led to the slaughter, it shall be as a lamb.*" Note, It becomes God's ministers, that are warm in preaching, to be calm in suffering and to behave submissively to the powers that are over them, though they be persecuting powers. But, for themselves, he tells them that it is at their peril if they put him to death: *You shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves, v. 15*. They might think that killing the prophet would help to defeat the prophecy, but they would prove wretchedly deceived; it would but add to their guilt and aggravate their ruin. Their own consciences could not but tell them that, if Jeremiah was (as certainly he was) sent of God to bring them this message, it was at their utmost peril if they treated him for it as a malefactor. Those that persecute God's ministers hurt not them so much as themselves.

16 Then said the princes and all the people unto the priests and to the prophets; This man is not worthy to die: for he hath spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God. 17 Then rose up certain of the elders of the land, and spake to all the assembly of the people, saying, 18 Micah the Morasthite prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and spake to all the people of Judah, saying Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Zion shall be ploughed *like* a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest. 19 Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him at all to death? did he not fear the LORD, and besought the LORD, and the LORD repented him of the evil which he had pronounced against them? Thus might we procure great evil against our souls. 20 And there was also a man that prophesied in the name of the LORD, Urijah the son of Shemaiah of Kirjath-jearim, who prophesied against this city and against this land according to all the words of Jeremiah: 21 And when Jehoiakim the king, with all his mighty men, and all the princes, heard his words, the king sought to put him to death:

but when Urijah heard it, he was afraid, and fled, and went into Egypt; 22 And Jehoiakim the king sent men into Egypt, *namely*, Elnathan the son of Achbor, and *certain* men with him into Egypt. 23 And they fetched forth Urijah out of Egypt, and brought him unto Jehoiakim the king; who slew him with the sword, and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people. 24 Nevertheless the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah, that they should not give him into the hand of the people to put him to death.

Here is, I. The acquitting of Jeremiah from the charge exhibited against him. He had indeed spoken the words as they were laid in the indictment, but they are not looked upon to be seditious or treasonable, ill-intended or of any bad tendency, and therefore the court and country agree to find him not guilty. The priests and prophets, notwithstanding his rational plea for himself, continued to demand judgment against him; but the princes, and all the people, are clear in it that *this man is not worthy to die* (v. 16); for (say they) *he hath spoken to us*, not of himself, but *in the name of the Lord our God*. And are they willing to own that he did indeed speak to them *in the name of the Lord* and that that Lord is their God? Why then did they not amend their ways and doings, and take the method he prescribed to prevent the ruin of their country? If they say, His prophecy is *from heaven*, it may justly be asked, *Why did you not then believe him?* Matt. xxi. 25. Note, It is a pity that those who are so far convinced of the divine original of gospel preaching as to protect it from the malice of others do not submit to the power and influence of it themselves.

II. A precedent quoted to justify them in acquitting Jeremiah. Some of the *elders of the land*, either the princes before mentioned or the more intelligent men of the people, stood up, and put the assembly in mind of a former case, as is usual with us in giving judgment; for the wisdom of our predecessors is a direction to us. The case referred to is that of Micah. We have extant the book of his prophecy among the minor prophets. 1. Was it thought strange that Jeremiah prophesied against this city and the temple? Micah did so before him, even in the reign of Hezekiah, that reign of reformation, v. 18. Micah said it as publicly as Jeremiah had now spoken to the same purport, *Zion shall be ploughed like a field*, the building shall be all destroyed, so that nothing shall hinder but it may be ploughed; *Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins*, and

*the mountain of the house on which the temple is built shall be as the high places of the forest*, overrun with briars and thorns. That prophet not only spoke this, but wrote it, and left it on record; we find it, Mic. iii. 12. By this it appears that a man may be, as Micah was, a true prophet of the Lord, and yet may prophesy the destruction of Zion and Jerusalem. When we threaten secure sinners with the taking away of the Spirit of God and the kingdom of God from them, and declining churches with the removal of the candlestick, we say no more than what has been said many a time, and what we have warrant from the word of God to say. 2. Was it thought fit by the princes to justify Jeremiah in what he had done? It was what Hezekiah did before them in a like case. Did Hezekiah, and the people of Judah (that is, the representatives of the people, the commons in parliament), did they complain of Micah the prophet? Did they impeach him, or make an act to silence him and put him to death? No; on the contrary, they took the warning he gave them. Hezekiah, that renowned prince, of blessed memory, set a good example before his successors, for he *feared the Lord* (v. 19), as Noah, who, being *warned of God of things not seen as yet*, was *moved with fear*. Micah's preaching drove him to his knees; he *besought the Lord* to turn away the judgment threatened and to be reconciled to them, and he found it was not in vain to do so, for *the Lord repented him of the evil* and returned in mercy to them; he sent an angel, who routed the army of the Assyrians, that threatened to plough Zion like a field. Hezekiah got good by the preaching, and then you may be sure he would do no harm to the preacher. These elders conclude that it would be of dangerous consequence to the state if they should gratify the importunity of the priests and prophets in putting Jeremiah to death: *Thus might we procure great evil against our souls*. Note, It is good to deter ourselves from sin with the consideration of the mischief we shall certainly do to ourselves by it and the irreparable damage it will be to our own souls.

III. Here is an instance of another prophet that was put to death by Jehoiakim for prophesying as Jeremiah had done, v. 20, &c. Some make this to be urged by the prosecutors, as a case that favoured the prosecution, a modern case, in which speaking such words as Jeremiah had spoken was adjudged treason. Others think that the elders, who were advocates for Jeremiah, alleged this to show that thus they might *procure great evil against their souls*, for it would be adding sin to sin. Jehoiakim, the present king, had slain one prophet already; let them not fill up the measure by slaying another. Hezekiah, who protected Micah, prospered; but did Jehoiakim prosper who slew Urijah? No; they all saw the con-



trary. As good examples, and the good consequences of them, should encourage us in that which is good, so the examples of bad men, and the bad consequences of them, should deter us from that which is evil. But some good interpreters take this narrative from the historian that penned the book, Jeremiah himself, or Baruch, who, to make Jeremiah's deliverance by means of the princes the more wonderful, takes notice of this that happened about the same time; for both were in the reign of Jehoiakim, and this in the *beginning of his reign*, v. 1. Observe, 1. Urijah's prophecy. It was *against this city, and this land, according to all the words of Jeremiah*. The prophets of the Lord agreed in their testimony, and one would have thought that out of the mouth of so many witnesses the word would be regarded. 2. The prosecution of him for it, v. 21. Jehoiakim and his courtiers were exasperated against him, and *sought to put him to death*; in this wicked design the king himself was principally concerned. 3. His absconding thereupon: *When he heard that the king had become his enemy, and sought his life, he was afraid, and fled, and went into Egypt*. This was certainly his fault, and an effect of the weakness of his faith, and it sped accordingly. He distrusted God, and his power to protect him and bear him out; he was too much under the power of that *fear of man which brings a snare*. It looked as if he durst not stand to what he had said or was ashamed of his Master. It was especially unbecoming him to flee *into Egypt*, and so in effect to abandon the land of Israel and to throw himself quite out of the way of being useful. Note, There are many that have much grace, but they have little courage, that are very honest, but withal very timorous. 4. His execution notwithstanding. Jehoiakim's malice, one would think, might have contented itself with his banishment, and it might suffice to have driven him out of the country; but those are *blood-thirsty* that *hate the upright*, Prov. xxix. 10. It was the life, that precious life, that he hunted after, and nothing else would satisfy him. So implacable is his revenge that he sends a party of soldiers into Egypt, some hundreds of miles, and they bring him back by force of arms. It would not sufficiently gratify him to have him slain in Egypt, but he must feed his eyes with the bloody spectacle. *They brought him to Jehoiakim, and he slew him with the sword*, for aught I know with his own hands. Yet neither did this satisfy his insatiable malice, but he loads the dead body of the good man with infamy, would not allow it the decent respects usually and justly paid to the remains of men of distinction, but cast it into the *graves of the common people*, as if he had not been a prophet of the Lord; thus was the *shield of Saul vilely cast away, as though he had not been anointed with oil*. Thus Jehoiakim

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hoped both to ruin his reputation with the people, that no heed might be given to his predictions, and to deter others from prophesying in like manner; but in vain; Jeremiah says the same. There is no contending with the word of God. Herod thought he had gained his point when he had cut off John Baptist's head, but found himself deceived when, soon after, he heard of Jesus Christ, and said, in a fright, *This is John the Baptist*.

IV. Here is Jeremiah's deliverance. Though Urijah was lately put to death, and persecutors, when they have tasted the blood of saints, are apt to thirst after more (as Herod, Acts xii. 2, 3), yet God wonderfully preserved Jeremiah, though he did not flee, as Urijah did, but stood his ground. Ordinary ministers may use ordinary means, provided they be lawful ones, for their own preservation; but those that had an extraordinary mission might expect an extraordinary protection. God raised up a friend for Jeremiah, whose hand was with him; he took him by the hand in a friendly way, encouraged him, assisted him, appeared for him. It was *Ahikam the son of Shaphan*, one that was a minister of state in Josiah's time; we read of him, 2 Kings xxii. 12. Some think Gedaliah was the son of this Ahikam. He had a great interest, it should seem, among the princes, and he used it in favour of Jeremiah, to prevent the further designs of the priests and prophets against him, who would have had him turned over *into the hand of the people*, not those people (v. 16) that had adjudged him innocent, but the rude and insolent mob, whom they could persuade by their cursed insinuations not only to cry, *Crucify him, crucify him*, but to *stone him to death* in a popular tumult; for perhaps Jehoiakim had been so reproached by his own conscience for slaying Urijah that they despaired of making him the tool of their malice. Note, God can, when he pleases, raise up great men to patronise good men; and it is an encouragement to us to trust him in the way of duty that he has all men's hearts in his hands.

## CHAP. XXVII.

Jeremiah the prophet, since he cannot persuade people to submit to God's precept, and so to prevent the destruction of their country by the king of Babylon, is here persuading them to submit to God's providence, by yielding tamely to the king of Babylon, and becoming tributaries to him, which was the wisest course they could now take, and would be a mitigation of the calamity, and prevent the laying of their country waste by fire and sword; the submitting of their liberties would be the saving of their lives. I. He gives this counsel, in God's name, to the kings of the neighbouring nations, that they might make the best of bad, assuring them that there was no remedy, but they must serve the king of Babylon; and yet in time there should be relief, for his dominion should last but 70 years, ver. 1-11. II. He gives this counsel to Zedekiah king of Judah particularly (ver. 12-15) and to the priests and people, assuring them that the king of Babylon should still proceed against them till things were brought to the last extremity, and a patient submission would be the only way to mitigate the calamity and make it easy, ver. 16-22. Thus the prophet, if they would but have hearkened to him, would have directed them to the paths of true policy as well as of true piety.

IN the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king

of Judah came this word unto Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, 2 Thus saith the LORD to me; Make thee bonds and yokes, and put them upon thy neck, 3 And send them to the king of Edom, and to the king of Moab, and to the king of the Ammonites, and to the king of Tyrus, and to the king of Zidon, by the hand of the messengers which come to Jerusalem unto Zedekiah king of Judah; 4 And command them to say unto their masters, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Thus shall ye say unto your masters; 5 I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are upon the ground, by my great power and by my out-stretched arm, and have given it unto whom it seemed meet unto me. 6 And now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant; and the beasts of the field have I given him also to serve him. 7 And all nations shall serve him, and his son, and his son's son, until the very time of his land come: and then many nations and great kings shall serve themselves of him. 8 And it shall come to pass, that the nation and kingdom which will not serve the same Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and that will not put their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation will I punish, saith the LORD, with the sword, and with the famine, and with the pestilence, until I have consumed them by his hand. 9 Therefore hearken not ye to your prophets, nor to your diviners, nor to your dreamers, nor to your enchanters, nor to your sorcerers, which speak unto you, saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon: 10 For they prophesy a lie unto you, to remove you far from your land; and that I should drive you out, and ye should perish. 11 But the nations that bring their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him, those will I let remain still in their own land, saith the LORD; and they shall till it, and dwell therein.

Some difficulty occurs in the date of this prophecy. This word is said to come to

Jeremiah in the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim (v. 1), and yet the messengers, to whom he is to deliver the badges of servitude, are said (v. 3) to come to Zedekiah king of Judah, who reigned not till eleven years after the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign. Some make it an error of the copy, and think that it should be read (v. 1), *In the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah*, for which some negligent scribe, having his eye on the title of the foregoing chapter, wrote *Jehoiakim*. And, if one would admit a mistake any where, it should be here, for Zedekiah is mentioned again (v. 12), and the next prophecy is dated the same year, and said to be in the *beginning of the reign of Zedekiah*, ch. xxviii. 1. Dr. Lightfoot solves it thus: In the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign Jeremiah is to make these bonds and yokes, and to put them upon his own neck, in token of Judah's subjection to the king of Babylon, which began at that time; but he is to send them to the neighbouring kings afterwards in the reign of Zedekiah, of whose succession to Jehoiakim, and the ambassadors sent to him, mention is made by way of prediction.

I. Jeremiah is to prepare a sign of the general reduction of all these countries into subjection to the king of Babylon (v. 2): *Make thee bonds and yokes*, yokes with bonds to fasten them, that the beast may not slip his neck out of the yoke. Into these the prophet must put his own neck to make them taken notice of as a prophetic representation; for every one would enquire, What is the meaning of Jeremiah's yokes? We find him with one on, ch. xxviii. 10. Hereby he intimated that he advised them to nothing but what he was resolved to do himself; for he was not one of those that *bind heavy burdens* on others, which they themselves will *not touch with one of their fingers*. Ministers must thus lay themselves under the weight and obligation of what they preach to others.

II. He is to send this, with a sermon annexed to it, to all the neighbouring princes; those are mentioned (v. 3) that lay next to the land of Canaan. It should seem, there was a treaty of alliance on foot between the king of Judah and all those other kings. Jerusalem was the place appointed for the treaty. Thither they all sent their plenipotentiaries; and it was agreed that they should bind themselves in a league offensive and defensive, to stand by one another, in opposition to the growing threatening greatness of the king of Babylon, and to reduce his exorbitant power. They had great confidence in their strength thus united, and were ready to call themselves the high allies; but, when the envoys were returning to their respective masters with the ratification of this treaty, Jeremiah gives each of them a yoke to carry to his master, to signify to him that he must either by consent or by compulsion become a servant to the king of Babylon



let him choose which he will. In the sermon upon this sign, 1. God asserts his own indisputable right to dispose of kingdoms as he pleases, v. 5. He is the Creator of all things; he *made the earth* at first, established it, and it abides: it is still the same, though *one generation passes away and another comes*. He still by a continued creation produces *man and beast upon the ground*, and it is by his *great power and outstretched arm*. His arm has infinite strength, though it be stretched out. Upon this account he may give and convey a property and dominion to whomsoever he pleases. As he hath graciously *given the earth to the children of men* in general (Ps. cxv. 16), so he gives to each his share of it, be it more or less. Note, Whatever any have of the good things of this world, it is what God sees fit to give them; we ourselves should therefore be content, though we have ever so little, and not envy any their share, though they have ever so much. 2. He publishes a grant of all these countries to Nebuchadnezzar. Know all men by these presents. *Sciant presentes et futuri—Let those of the present and those of the future age know.* "This is to certify to all whom it may concern that I have *given all these lands*, with all the wealth of them, *into the hands of the king of Babylon*; even the *beasts of the field*, whether tame or wild, *have I given to him*, parks and pastures; they are all his own." Nebuchadnezzar was a proud wicked man, an idolater; and yet God, in his providence, gives him this large dominion, these vast possessions. Note, The things of this world are not the best things, for God often gives the largest share of them to bad men, that are rivals with him and rebels against him. He was a wicked man, and yet what he had he had by divine grant. Note, Dominion is not founded in grace. Those that have not any colourable title to eternal happiness may yet have a justifiable title to their temporal good things. Nebuchadnezzar is a very bad man, and yet God calls him his servant, because he employed him as an instrument of his providence for the chastising of the nations, and particularly his own people; and for his service therein he thus liberally repaid him. Those whom God makes use of shall not lose by him; much more will he be found the bountiful rewarder of all those that designedly and sincerely serve him. 3. He assures them that they should all be unavoidably brought under the dominion of the king of Babylon for a time (v. 7): *All nations*, all these nations and many others, shall serve him, and his son, and his son's son. His son was Evil-merodach, and his son's son Belshazzar, in whom the kingdom ceased: then the time of reckoning with his land came, when the tables were turned, and *many nations and great kings*, incorporated into the empire of the Medes and Persians, *served themselves of him*, as before, ch. xxv.

14. Thus Adonibezek was trampled upon himself, as he had trampled on other kings. 4. He threatens those with military execution that stood out and would not submit to the king of Babylon (v. 8): That nation that will not *put their neck under his yoke* I will *punish with sword and famine*, with one judgment after another, till it is *consumed by his hand*. Nebuchadnezzar was very unjust and barbarous in invading the rights and liberties of his neighbours thus, and forcing them into a subjection to him; yet God had just and holy ends in permitting him to do so, to punish these nations for their idolatry and gross immoralities. Those that would not serve the God that made them were justly made to serve their enemies that sought to ruin them. 5. He shows them the vanity of all the hopes they fed themselves with, that they should preserve their liberties, v. 9, 10. These nations had their prophets too, that pretended to foretell future events by the stars, or by dreams, or enchantments; and they, to please their patrons, and because they would themselves have it so, flattered them with assurances that they *should not serve the king of Babylon*. Thus they designed to animate them to a vigorous resistance; and, though they had no ground for it, they hoped hereby to do them service. But he tells them that it would prove to their destruction; for by resisting they would provoke the conqueror to deal severely with them, to *remove them*, and *drive them out* into a miserable captivity, in which they should all be lost and buried in oblivion. Particular prophecies against these nations that bordered on Israel severally, the ruin of which is here foretold in the general, we shall meet with, ch. xlviii. and xlix., and Ezek. xxv. which had the same accomplishment with this here. Note, *When God judges he will overcome*. 6. He puts them in a fair way to prevent their destruction by a quiet and easy submission, v. 11. The nations that will be content to *serve the king of Babylon*, and pay him tribute for seventy years (ten apprenticeships), *those will I let remain still in their own land*. Those that will bend shall not break. Perhaps the dominion of the king of Babylon may bear no harder upon them than that of their own kings had done. It is often more a point of honour than true wisdom to prefer liberty before life. It is not mentioned to the disgrace of Issachar that because he saw *rest was good*, and the *land pleasant*, that he might peaceably enjoy it, he bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant to tribute (Gen. xlix. 14, 15), as these are here advised to do: *Serve the king of Babylon and you shall till the land and dwell therein*. Some would condemn this as the evidence of a mean spirit, but the prophet recommends it as that of a meek spirit, which yields to necessity, and by a quiet submission to the hardest turns of Providence makes the best of bad: it is

better to do so than by struggling to make it worse.

—Levius fit patientiā  
Quicquid corrigere est nefas.—HOR.

—When we needs must bear,  
Enduring patience makes the burden light.

CREECH.

Many might have prevented destroying providences by humbling themselves under humbling providences. It is better to take up a lighter cross in our way than to pull a heavier on our own head.

12 I spake also to Zedekiah king of Judah according to all these words, saying, Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live. 13 Why will ye die, thou and thy people, by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, as the LORD hath spoken against the nation that will not serve the king of Babylon? 14 Therefore hearken not unto the words of the prophets that speak unto you, saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon: for they prophesy a lie unto you. 15 For I have not sent them, saith the LORD, yet they prophesy a lie in my name; that I might drive you out, and that ye might perish, ye, and the prophets that prophesy unto you. 16 Also I spake to the priests and to all this people, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Hearken not to the words of your prophets that prophesy unto you, saying, Behold, the vessels of the LORD's house shall now shortly be brought again from Babylon: for they prophesy a lie unto you. 17 Hearken not unto them; serve the king of Babylon, and live: wherefore should this city be laid waste? 18 But if they be prophets, and if the word of the LORD be with them, let them now make intercession to the LORD of hosts, that the vessels which are left in the house of the LORD, and in the house of the king of Judah, and at Jerusalem, go not to Babylon. 19 For thus saith the LORD of hosts concerning the pillars, and concerning the sea, and concerning the bases, and concerning the residue of the vessels that remain in this city, 20 Which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took not, when he carried away captive

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Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah from Jerusalem to Babylon, and all the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem; 21 Yea, thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning the vessels that remain in the house of the LORD, and in the house of the king of Judah and of Jerusalem; 22 They shall be carried to Babylon, and there shall they be until the day that I visit them, saith the LORD; then will I bring them up, and restore them to this place.

What was said to all the nations is here with a particular tenderness applied to the nation of the Jews, for whom Jeremiah was sensibly concerned. The case at present stood thus: Judah and Jerusalem had often contested with the king of Babylon, and still were worsted; many both of their valuable persons and their valuable goods were carried to Babylon already, and some of the *vessels of the Lord's house* particularly. Now how this struggle would issue was the question. They had those among them at Jerusalem who pretended to be prophets, who bade them hold out and they should, in a little time, be too hard for the king of Babylon and recover all that they had lost. Now Jeremiah is sent to bid them yield and knock under, for that, instead of recovering what they had lost, they should otherwise lose all that remained; and to press them to this is the scope of these verses.

I. Jeremiah humbly addresses the king of Judah, to persuade him to surrender to the king of Babylon. His act would be the people's and would determine them, and therefore he speaks to him as to them all (v. 12): *Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon and live.* Is it their wisdom to submit to the heavy iron yoke of a cruel tyrant, that they may secure the lives of their bodies? And is it not much more our wisdom to submit to the sweet and easy yoke of our rightful Lord and Master Jesus Christ, that we may secure the lives of our souls? Bring down your spirits to repentance and faith, and that is the way to bring up your spirits to heaven and glory. And with much more cogency and compassion may we expostulate with perishing souls than Jeremiah here expostulates with a perishing people: "*Why will you die by the sword and the famine—miserable deaths, which you inevitably run yourselves upon, under pretence of avoiding miserable lives?*" What God had spoken, in general, of all those that would not submit to the king of Babylon, he would have them to apply to themselves and be afraid of. It were well if sinners would, in like manner, be afraid of the destruction threatened against all those that will not have *Christ to reign over them*, and reason



thus with themselves, "*Why should we die the second death, which is a thousand times worse than that by sword and famine, when we might submit and live?*"

II. He addresses himself likewise to the priests and the people (v. 16), to persuade them to *serve the king of Babylon*, that they might *live*, and might prevent the desolation of the city (v. 17): "*Wherefore should it be laid waste, as certainly it will be if you stand it out?*" The priests had been Jeremiah's enemies, and had sought his life to destroy it, yet he approves himself their friend, and seeks their lives, to preserve and secure them, which is an example to us to render *good for evil*. When the *blood-thirsty hate the upright, yet the just seek his soul*, and the welfare of it, Prov. xxix. 10. The matter was far gone here; they were upon the brink of ruin, which they would not have been brought to if they would have taken Jeremiah's counsel; yet he continues his friendly admonitions to them, to save the last stake and manage that wisely, and now at length in this their day to understand the *things that belong to their peace*, when they had but one day to turn them in.

III. In both these addresses he warns them against giving credit to the false prophets that rocked them asleep in their security, because they saw that they loved to slumber: "*Hearken not to the words of the prophets* (v. 14), *your prophets*, v. 16. They are not God's prophets; he never sent them; they do not serve him, nor seek to please him; they are yours, for they say what you would have them say, and aim at nothing but to please you." Two things their prophets flattered them into the belief of:—1. That the power which the king of Babylon had gained over them should now shortly be broken. They said (v. 14), "*You shall not serve the king of Babylon*; you need not submit voluntarily, for you shall not be compelled to submit." This they prophesied *in the name of the Lord* (v. 15), as if God had sent them to the people on this errand, in kindness to them, that they might not disparage themselves by an inglorious surrender. But it was a lie. They said that God sent them; but that was false; he disowns it: *I have not sent them, saith the Lord*. They said that they should never be brought into subjection to the king of Babylon; but that was false too, the event proved it so. They said that to hold out to the last would be the way to secure themselves and their city; but that was false, for it would certainly end in their being driven out and perishing. So that it was all a lie, from first to last; and the prophets that deceived the people with these lies did, in the issue, but deceive themselves; the blind leaders and the blind followers fell together into the ditch: *That you might perish, you, and the prophets that prophesy unto you*, who will be so far from warranting your security that they cannot secure themselves. Note, Those that encour-

rage sinners to go on in their sinful ways will in the end perish with them. 2. They prophesied that the vessels of the temple, which the king of Babylon had already carried away, should now shortly be brought back (v. 16); this they fed the priests with the hopes of, knowing how acceptable it would be to them, who loved the *gold of the temple* better than the *temple that sanctified the gold*. These vessels were taken away when Jeconiah was carried captive into Babylon, v. 20. We have the story, and it is a melancholy one, 2 Kings xxiv. 13, 15; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 10. All the *goodly vessels* (that is, all the *vessels of gold that were in the house of the Lord*), with all the treasures, were taken as prey, and brought to Babylon. This was grievous to them above any thing; for the temple was their pride and confidence, and the stripping of that was too plain an indication of that which the true prophet told them, that their *God had departed from them*. Their false prophets therefore had no other way to make them easy than by telling them that the king of Babylon should be forced to restore them in a little while. Now here, (1.) Jeremiah bids them think of preserving the vessels that remained by their prayers, rather than of bringing back those that were gone by their prophecies (v. 18): *If they be prophets*, as they pretend, and if *the word of the Lord be with them*—if they have any intercourse with heaven and any interest there, let them improve it for the stopping of the progress of the judgment; let them step into the gap, and stand with their censor *between the living and the dead*, between that which is carried away and that which remains, that *the plague may be stayed*; let them *make intercession with the Lord of hosts*, that the vessels which are left go not after the rest. [1.] Instead of prophesying, let them pray. Note, Prophets must be praying men; by being much in prayer they must make it to appear that they keep up a correspondence with heaven. We cannot think that those do, as prophets, ever hear thence, who do not frequently by prayer send thither. By praying for the safety and prosperity of the sanctuary they must make it to appear that, as becomes prophets, they are of a public spirit; and by the success of their prayers it will appear that God favours them. [2.] Instead of being concerned for the retrieving of what they had lost, they must bestir themselves for the securing of what was left, and take it as a great favour if they can gain that point. When God's judgments are abroad we must not seek great things, but be thankful for a little. (2.) He assures them that even this point should not be gained, but the brazen vessels should go after the golden ones, v. 19, 22. Nebuchadnezzar had found so good a booty once that he would be sure to come again and take all he could find, not only in *the house of the Lord*, but in *the king's house*. They shall all

be carried to Babylon in triumph, and *there shall they be*. But he concludes with a gracious promise that the time should come when they should all be returned: *Until the day that I visit them in mercy*, according to appointment, and *then I will bring those vessels up again, and restore them to this place*, to their place. Surely they were under the protection of a special Providence, else they would have been melted down and put to some other use; but there was to be a second temple, for which they were to be reserved. We read particularly of the return of them, Ezra i. 8. Note, Though the return of the church's prosperity do not come in our time, we must not therefore despair of it, for it will come in God's time. Though those who said, *The vessels of the Lord's house shall shortly be brought again*, prophesied a lie (v. 16), yet he that said, *They shall at length be brought again*, prophesied the truth. We are apt to set our clock before God's dial, and then to quarrel because they do not agree; but the Lord is a God of judgment, and it is fit that we should wait for him.

## CHAP. XXVIII.

In the foregoing chapter Jeremiah had charged those prophets with lies who foretold the speedy breaking of the yoke of the king of Babylon and the speedy return of the vessels of the sanctuary; now here we have his contest with a particular prophet upon those heads. I. Hananiah, a pretender to prophecy, in contradiction to Jeremiah, foretold the sinking of Nebuchadnezzar's power and the return both of the persons and of the vessels that were carried away (ver. 1-4), and, as a sign of this, he broke the yoke from the neck of Jeremiah, ver. 10, 11. II. Jeremiah wished his words might prove true, but appealed to the event whether they were so or no; not doubting but that would disprove them, ver. 5-9. III. The doom both of the deceived and the deceiver is here read. The people that were deceived should have their yoke of wood turned into a yoke of iron (ver. 12-14), and the prophet that was the deceiver should be shortly cut off by death, and he was so, accordingly, within two months, ver. 15-17.

AND it came to pass the same year, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fourth year, and in the fifth month, that Hananiah the son of Azur the prophet, which *was* of Gibeon, spake unto me in the house of the LORD, in the presence of the priests, and of all the people, saying, 2 Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, saying, I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. 3 Within two full years will I bring again into this place all the vessels of the LORD's house, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place, and carried them to Babylon: 4 And I will bring again to this place Jecooniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, with all the captives of Judah, that went into Babylon, saith the LORD: for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. 5 Then the

prophet Jeremiah said unto the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests, and in the presence of all the people that stood in the house of the LORD, 6 Even the prophet Jeremiah said, Amen: the LORD do so: the LORD perform thy words which thou hast prophesied, to bring again the vessels of the LORD's house, and all that is carried away captive, from Babylon into this place. 7 Nevertheless hear thou now this word that I speak in thine ears, and in the ears of all the people; 8 The prophets that have been before me and before thee of old prophesied both against many countries, and against great kingdoms, of war, and of evil, and of pestilence. 9 The prophet which prophesieth of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the LORD hath truly sent him.

This struggle between a true prophet and a false one is said here to have happened in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah, and yet in the fourth year, for the first four years of his reign might well be called the beginning, or former part, of it, because during those years he reigned under the dominion of the king of Babylon and as a tributary to him; whereas the rest of his reign, which might well be called the latter part of it, in distinction from that former part, he reigned in rebellion against the king of Babylon. In this fourth year of his reign he went in person to Babylon (as we find, ch. li. 59), and it is probable that this gave the people some hope that his negotiation in person would put a good end to the war, in which hope the false prophets encouraged them, this Hananiah particularly, who was of Gibeon, a priests' city, and therefore probably himself a priest, as well as Jeremiah. Now here we have,

I. The prediction which Hananiah delivered publicly, solemnly, in the house of the LORD, and in the name of the LORD, in an august assembly, in the presence of the priests and of all the people, who probably were expecting to have some message from heaven. In delivering this prophecy, he faced Jeremiah, he spoke it to him (v. 1), designing to confront and contradict him, as much as to say, "Jeremiah, thou liest." Now this prediction is that the king of Babylon's power, at least his power over Judah and Jerusalem, should be speedily broken, that within two full years the vessels of the temple should be brought back, and Jeremiah, and all the captives that were carried away with him, should return; whereas Jeremiah had foretold that the yoke of the king of Babylon



should be bound on yet faster, and that the vessels and captives should not return for 70 years, v. 2—4. Now, upon the reading of this sham prophecy, and comparing it with the messages that God sent by the true prophets, we may observe what a vast difference there is between them. Here is nothing of the spirit and life, the majesty of style and sublimity of expression, that appear in the discourses of God's prophets, nothing of that divine flame and *flatus*. But that which is especially wanting here is an air of piety; he speaks with a great deal of confidence of the return of their prosperity, but here is not a word of good counsel given them to repent, and reform, and return to God, to pray, and seek his face, that they may be prepared for the favours God had in reserve for them. He promises them temporal mercies, in God's name, but makes no mention of those spiritual mercies which God always promised should go along with them, as *ch. xxiv. 7, I will give them a heart to know me*. By all this it appears that, whatever he pretended, he had only the *spirit of the world*, not the *Spirit of God* (1 Cor. ii. 12), that he aimed to please, not to profit.

II. Jeremiah's reply to this pretended prophecy. 1. He heartily wishes it might prove true. Such an affection has he for his country, and so truly desirous is he of the welfare of it, that he would be content to lie under the imputation of a false prophet, so that their ruin might be prevented. He said, *Amen; the Lord do so; the Lord perform thy words, v. 5, 6*. This was not the first time that Jeremiah had prayed for his people, though he had prophesied against them, and deprecated the judgments which yet he certainly knew would come; as Christ prayed, *Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me*, when yet he knew it must not pass from him. Though, as a faithful prophet, he foresaw and foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, yet, as a faithful Israelite, he prayed earnestly for the preservation of it, in obedience to that command, *Pray for the peace of Jerusalem*. Though the will of God's purpose is the rule of prophecy and patience, the will of his precept is the rule of prayer and practice. God himself, though he has determined, does not desire, the death of sinners, but would have all men to be saved. Jeremiah often interceded for his people, *ch. xviii. 20*. The false prophets thought to ingratiate themselves with the people by promising them peace; now the prophet shows that he bore them as great a good-will as their prophets did, whom they were so fond of; and, though he had no warrant from God to promise them peace, yet he earnestly desired it and prayed for it. How strangely were those besotted who caressed those who did them the greatest wrong imaginable by flattering them, and persecuted him who did them the greatest service imaginable by interceding for them! See *ch. xxvii. 18. 2.*

He appeals to the event, to prove it false, v. 7—9. The false prophets reflected upon Jeremiah, as Ahab upon Micaiah, because he never *prophesied good concerning them, but evil*. Now he pleads that this had been the purport of the prophecies that other prophets had delivered, so that it ought not to be looked upon as a strange thing, or as rendering his mission doubtful; for prophets of old prophesied against *many countries and great kingdoms*, so bold were they in delivering the messages which God sent by them, and so far from fearing men, or seeking to please them, as Hananiah did. They made no difficulty, any more than Jeremiah did, of threatening war, famine, and pestilence, and what they said was regarded as coming from God; why then should Jeremiah be run down as a *pestilent fellow, and a sower of sedition*, when he preached no otherwise than God's prophets had always done before him? Other prophets had foretold destruction, and sometimes the destruction did not come, which yet did not disprove their divine mission, as in the case of Jonah; for God is gracious, and ready to turn away his wrath from those that turn away from their sins. But the prophet that *prophesied of peace* and prosperity, especially as Hananiah did, absolutely and unconditionally, without adding that necessary proviso, that they do not by wilful sin put a bar in their own door and stop the current of God's favours, will be proved a true prophet only by the accomplishment of his prediction; if it come to pass, then it shall be known that *the Lord has sent him*, but, if not, he will appear to be a cheat and an impostor.

10 Then Hananiah the prophet took the yoke from off the prophet Jeremiah's neck, and brake it. 11 And Hananiah spake in the presence of all the people, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all nations within the space of two full years. And the prophet Jeremiah went his way. 12 Then the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah the prophet, after that Hananiah the prophet had broken the yoke from off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah, saying, 13 Go and tell Hananiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Thou hast broken the yokes of wood; but thou shalt make for them yokes of iron. 14 For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; I have put a yoke of iron upon the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon;

and they shall serve him : and I have given him the beasts of the field also.

15 Then said the prophet Jeremiah unto Hananiah the prophet, Hear now, Hananiah ; The LORD hath not sent thee ; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie. 16 Therefore thus saith the LORD ; Behold, I will cast thee from off the face of the earth : this year thou shalt die, because thou hast taught rebellion against the LORD. 17 So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month.

We have here an instance,

I. Of the insolence of the false prophet. To complete the affront he designed Jeremiah, *he took the yoke from off his neck* which he carried as a memorial of what he had prophesied concerning the enslaving of the nations to Nebuchadnezzar, and he broke it, that he might give a sign of the accomplishment of this prophecy, as Jeremiah had given of his, and might seem to have conquered him, and to have defeated the intention of his prophecy. See how the lying spirit, in the mouth of this false prophet, mimics the language of the Spirit of truth : *Thus saith the Lord, So will I break the yoke of the king of Babylon, not only from the neck of this nation, but from the neck of all nations, within two full years.* Whether by the force of a heated imagination Hananiah had persuaded himself to believe this, or whether he knew it to be false, and only persuaded them to believe it, does not appear ; but it is plain that he speaks with abundance of assurance. It is no new thing for lies to be fathered upon the God of truth.

II. Of the patience of the true prophet. Jeremiah quietly *went his way*, and *when he was reviled he reviled not again*, and would not contend with one that was in the height of his fury and in the midst of the priests and people that were violently set against him. The reason why he went his way was not because he had nothing to answer, but because he was willing to stay till God was pleased to furnish him with a direct and immediate answer, which as yet he had not received. He expected that God would send a special message to Hananiah, and he would say nothing till he had received that. *I, as a deaf man, heard not, for thou wilt hear, and thou shalt answer, Lord, for me.* It may sometimes be our wisdom rather to retreat than to contend. *Currenti cede furori—Give place unto wrath.*

III. Of the justice of God in giving judgment between Jeremiah and his adversary. Jeremiah went his way, as a man *in whose mouth there was no rebuke*, but God soon put a word into his mouth ; for he will appear for those who silently commit their cause to him. 1. The word of God, in the

mouth of Jeremiah, is ratified and confirmed. Let not Jeremiah himself distrust the truth of what he had delivered in God's name because it met with such a daring opposition and contradiction. If what we have spoken be the truth of God, we must not unsay it because men gainsay it ; for *great is the truth and will prevail.* It will stand, therefore let us stand to it, and not fear that men's unbelief or blasphemy will make it of no effect. Hananiah has broken the *yokes of wood*, but Jeremiah must make for them *yokes of iron*, which cannot be broken (v. 13), for (says God) "*I have put a yoke of iron upon the neck of all these nations, which shall lie heavier, and bind harder, upon them (v. 14), that they may serve the king of Babylon, and not be able to shake off the yoke however they may struggle, for they shall serve him whether they will or no ;*" and who is he that can contend with God's counsel ? What was said before is repeated again : *I have given him the beasts of the field also*, as if there were something significant in that. Men had by their wickedness made themselves *like the beasts that perish*, and therefore deserved to be ruled by an arbitrary power, as beasts are ruled, and such a power Nebuchadnezzar ruled with ; for *whom he would he slew and whom he would he kept alive.* 2. Hananiah is sentenced to die for contradicting it, and Jeremiah, when he has received commission from God, boldly tells him so to his face, though before he received that commission he went away and said nothing. (1.) The crimes of which Hananiah stands convicted are cheating the people and affronting God : *Thou makest this people to trust in a lie*, encouraging them to hope that they shall have peace, which will make their destruction the more terrible to them when it comes ; yet this was not the worst : *Thou hast taught rebellion against the Lord ;* thou hast taught them to despise all the good counsel given them in God's name by the true prophets, and hast rendered it ineffectual. Those have a great deal to answer for who, by telling sinners that they shall have peace though they go on, harden their hearts in a contempt of the reproofs and admonitions of the word, and the means and methods God takes to bring them to repentance. (2.) The judgment given against him is, "*I will cast thee off from the face of the earth, as unworthy to live upon it ; thou shalt be buried in it. This year thou shalt die, and die as a rebel against the Lord, to whom death will come with a sting and a curse.*" This sentence was executed, v. 17. Hananiah died the same year, within two months ; for his prophecy is dated the fifth month (v. 1) and his death the seventh. Good men may perhaps be suddenly taken off by death in the midst of their days, and in mercy to them, as Josiah was ; but this being foretold as the punishment of his sin, and coming to pass accordingly, it may safely



be construed as a testimony from Heaven against him and a confirmation of Jeremiah's mission. And, if the people's hearts had not been wretchedly hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, it would have prevented their being further hardened by the deceitfulness of their prophets.

## CHAP. XXIX.

The contest between Jeremiah and the false prophets was carried on before by preaching, here by writing; there we had sermon against sermon, here we have letter against letter, for some of the false prophets are now carried away into captivity in Babylon, while Jeremiah remains in his own country. Now here is, I. A letter which Jeremiah wrote to the captives in Babylon, against their prophets that they had there (ver. 1—3), in which letter, 1. He endeavours to reconcile them to their captivity, to be easy under it and to make the best of it, ver. 4—7. 2. He cautions them not to give any credit to their false prophets, who seduced them with hopes of a speedy release, ver. 8, 9. 3. He assures them that God would restore them in mercy to their own land again, at the end of 70 years, ver. 10—14. 4. He foretells the destruction of those who yet continued, and that they should be persecuted with one judgment after another, and sent at last into captivity, ver. 15—19. 5. He prophesies the destruction of two of their false prophets that they had in Babylon, that both soothed them up in their sins and set them bad examples (ver. 20—23), and this is the purport of Jeremiah's letter. II. Here is a letter which Shemlah, a false prophet in Babylon, wrote to the priests at Jerusalem, to stir them up to persecute Jeremiah (ver. 24—29), and a denunciation of God's wrath against him for writing such a letter, ver. 30—32. Such struggles as these have there always been between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent.

NOW these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem unto the residue of the elders which were carried away captives, and to the priests, and to the prophets, and to all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon; 2 (After that Jeconiah the king, and the queen, and the eunuchs, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, and the carpenters, and the smiths, were departed from Jerusalem;) 3 By the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, (whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent unto Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon,) saying, 4 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all that are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon; 5 Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; 6 Take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished. 7 And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.

We are here told,

I. That Jeremiah wrote to the captives in Babylon, in the name of the Lord: Jeconiah had surrendered himself a prisoner, with the queen his mother, the chamberlains of his household, called here the *eunuchs*, and many of the *princes of Judah and Jerusalem*, who were at that time the most active men; the *carpenters and smiths* likewise, being demanded, were yielded up, that those who remained might not have any proper hands to fortify their city or furnish themselves with weapons of war. By this tame submission it was hoped that Nebuchadnezzar would be pacified. *Satis est prostrasse leoni—It suffices the lion to have laid his antagonist prostrate*; but the imperious conqueror grows upon their concessions, like Benhadad upon Ahab's, 1 Kings xx. 5, 6. And, not content with this, when these had departed from Jerusalem he comes again, and fetches away many more of the *elders, the priests, the prophets, and the people* (v. 1), such as he thought fit, or such as his soldiers could lay hands on, and carries them to Babylon. The case of these captives was very melancholy, the rather because they, being thus distinguished from the rest of their brethren who continued in their own land, looked as if they were greater sinners than all men who dwelt at Jerusalem. Jeremiah therefore writes a letter to them, to comfort them, assuring them that they had no reason either to despair of succour themselves or to envy their brethren that were left behind. Note, 1. The word of God written is as truly given by *inspiration of God* as his word spoken was; and this was the proper way of spreading the knowledge of God's will among his *children scattered abroad*. 2. We may serve God and do good by writing to our friends at a distance pious letters of seasonable comforts and wholesome counsels. Those whom we cannot speak to we may write to; that which is written remains. This letter of Jeremiah's was sent to the captives in Babylon by the hands of the ambassadors whom king Zedekiah sent to Nebuchadnezzar, probably to pay him his tribute and renew his submission to him, or to treat of peace with him, in which treaty the captives might perhaps hope that they should be included, v. 3. By such messengers Jeremiah chose to send this message, to put an honour upon it, because it was a message from God, or perhaps because there was no settled way of sending letters to Babylon, but as such an occasion as this offered, and then it made the condition of the captives there the more melancholy, that they could rarely hear from their friends and relations they had left behind, which is some reviving and satisfaction to those that are separated from one another.

II. We are here told what he wrote. A copy of the letter at large follows here to c. 24. In these verses,



1. He assures them that he wrote in the name of the *Lord of hosts, the God of Israel*, who indited the letter; Jeremiah was but the scribe or amanuensis. It would be comfortable to them, in their captivity, to hear that God is the *Lord of hosts*, of all hosts, and is therefore able to help and deliver them; and that he is the *God of Israel* still, a God in covenant with his people, though he contend with them, and their enemies for the present are too hard for them. This would likewise be an admonition to them to stand upon their guard against all temptations to the idolatry of Babylon, because the *God of Israel*, the God whom they served, is *Lord of hosts*. God's sending to them in this letter might be an encouragement to them in their captivity, as it was an evidence that he had not cast them off, had not abandoned them and disinherited them, though he was displeased with them and corrected them; for, if the Lord had been pleased to kill them, he would not have written to them.

2. God by him owns the hand he had in their captivity: *I have caused you to be carried away*, v. 4 and again, v. 7. All the force of the king of Babylon could not have done it if God had not ordered it; nor could he have any power against them but what was given him from above. If God caused them to be carried captives, they might be sure that he neither did them any wrong nor meant them any hurt. Note, It will help very much to reconcile us to our troubles, and to make us patient under them, to consider that they are what God has appointed us to. *I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it*.

3. He bids them think of nothing but settling there; and therefore let them resolve to make the best of it (v. 5, 6): *Build yourselves houses and dwell in them, &c.* By all this it is intimated to them, (1.) That they must not feed themselves with hopes of a speedy return out of their captivity, for that would keep them still unsettled and consequently uneasy; they would apply themselves to no business, take no comfort, but be always tiring themselves and provoking their conquerors with the expectations of relief; and their disappointment at last would sink them into despair and make their condition much more miserable than otherwise it would be. Let them therefore reckon upon a continuance there, and accommodate themselves to it as well as they can. Let them *build*, and *plant*, and *marry*, and dispose of their children there as if they were at home in their own land. Let them take a pleasure in seeing their families built up and multiplied; for, though they must expect themselves to die in captivity, yet their children may live to see better days. If they live in the fear of God, what should hinder them but they may live comfortably in Babylon? They cannot but *weep* sometimes when they remember Zion.

But let not weeping hinder sowing; let them not sorrow as those that have no hope, no joy; for they have both. Note, In all conditions of life it is our wisdom and duty to make the best of that which is, and not to throw away the comfort of what we may have because we have not all we would have. We have a natural affection for our native country; it strangely draws our minds; but it is with a *nescio qua dulcedine*—we can give no good account of the sweet attraction; and therefore, if Providence remove us to some other country, we must resolve to live easy there, to bring our mind to our condition when our condition is not in every thing to our mind. If the earth be the *Lord's*, then, wherever a child of God goes, he does not go off his Father's ground. *Patria est ubicunque bene est*—That place is our country in which we are well off. If things be not as they have been, instead of fretting at that, we must live in hopes that they will be better than they are. *Non si male nunc, et olim sic erit*—Though we suffer now we shall not always. (2.) That they must not disquiet themselves with fears of intolerable hardships in their captivity. They might be ready to suggest (as persons in trouble are always apt to make the worst of things) that it would be in vain to build houses, for their lords and masters would not suffer them to dwell in them when they had built them, nor to eat the fruit of the vineyards they planted. "Never fear," says God; "if you live peaceably with them, you shall find them civil to you." Meek and quiet people, that work and mind their own business, have often found much better treatment, even with strangers and enemies, than they expected; and God has made his people to be *pitied of those that carry them captives* (Ps. cvi. 46), and a pity it is but that those who have built houses should dwell in them. Nay,

4. He directs them to seek the good of the country where they were captives (v. 7), to pray for it, to endeavour to promote it. This forbids them to attempt any thing against the public peace while they were subjects to the king of Babylon. Though he was a heathen, an idolater, an oppressor, and an enemy to God and his church, yet, while he gave them protection, they must pay him allegiance, and live *quiet and peaceable lives* under him, in all *godliness and honesty*, not plotting to shake off his yoke, but patiently leaving it to God in due time to work deliverance for them. Nay, they must pray to God for the peace of the places where they were, that they might oblige them to continue their kindness to them and disprove the character that had been given their nation, that they were *hurtful to kings and provinces*, and *moved sedition*, Ezra iv. 15. Both the wisdom of the serpent and the innocence of the dove required them to be true to the government they lived under: *For in the peace thereof you shall have peace*;



should the country be embroiled in war, they would have the greatest share in the calamitous effects of it. Thus the primitive Christians, according to the temper of their holy religion, prayed for the powers that were, though they were persecuting powers. And, if they were to pray for and seek the peace of the land of their captivity, much more reason have we to pray for the welfare of the land of our nativity, where we are a free people under a good government, *that in the peace thereof we and ours may have peace.* Every passenger is concerned in the safety of the ship.

8 For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Let not your prophets and your diviners, that *be* in the midst of you, deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed. 9 For they prophesy falsely unto you in my name: I have not sent them, saith the LORD. 10 For thus saith the LORD, that after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. 11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. 12 Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. 13 And ye shall seek me, and find *me*, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. 14 And I will be found of you, saith the LORD: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the LORD; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive.

To make the people quiet and easy in their captivity,

I. God takes them off from building upon the false foundation which their pretended prophets laid, *v.* 8, 9. They told them that their captivity should be short, and therefore that they must not think of taking root in Babylon, but be upon the wing to go back: "Now herein *they deceive you*," says God; "*they prophesy a lie to you*, though they prophesy in my name. But let them not deceive you, suffer not yourselves to be deluded by them." As long as we have the word of truth to try the spirits by it is our own fault if we be deceived; for by it we may be undeceived. *Hearken not to your dreams,*

*which you cause to be dreamed.* He means either the dreams or fancies which the people pleased themselves with, and with which they filled their own heads (by thinking and speaking of nothing else but a speedy enlargement when they were awake they caused themselves to dream of it when they were asleep, and then took that for a good omen, and with it strengthened themselves in their vain expectations), or the dreams which the prophets dreamed and grounded their prophecies upon. God tells the people, *They are your dreams*, because they pleased them, were the dreams that they desired and wished for. *They caused them to be dreamed;* for they hearkened to them, and encouraged the prophets to put such deceits upon them, desiring them to prophesy nothing but *smooth things*, *Isa.* xxx. 10. They were dreams of their own bespeaking. False prophets would not flatter people in their sins, but that they love to be flattered, and speak smoothly to their prophets that their prophets may speak smoothly to them.

II. He gives them a good foundation to build their hopes upon. We would not persuade people to pull down the house they have built upon the sand, but that there is a rock ready for them to rebuild upon. God here promises them that, though they should not return quickly, they should return at length, *after seventy years be accomplished.* By this it appears that the seventy years of the captivity are not to be reckoned from the last captivity, but the first. Note, Though the deliverance of the church do not come in our time, it is sufficient that it will come in God's time, and we are sure that that is the best time. The promise is that God will visit them in mercy; though he had long seemed to be strange to them, he will come among them, and appear for them, and put honour upon them, as great men do upon their inferiors by coming to visit them. He will put an end to *their captivity*, and *turn away* all the calamities of it. Though they are dispersed, some in one country and some in another, he will *gather them from all the places whither they are driven*, will set up a standard for them all to resort to, and incorporate them again in one body. And though they are at a great distance they shall be brought again to their own land, *to the place whence they were carried captive*, *v.* 14. Now, 1. This shall be the performance of God's promise to them (*v.* 10): *I will perform my good word towards you. Let not the failing of those predictions which are delivered as from God lessen the reputation of those that really are from him. That which is indeed God's word is a good word, and therefore it will be made good, and not one iota or tittle of it shall fall to the ground. Hath he said, and shall he not do it?* This will make their return out of captivity very comfortable, that it will be the performance of God's good word to them, the product of

a gracious promise. 2. This shall be in pursuance of God's purposes concerning them (v. 11): *I know the thoughts that I think towards you.* Known unto God are all his works, for known unto him are all his thoughts (Acts xv. 18) and his works agree exactly with his thoughts; he does all *according to the counsel of his will.* We often do not know our own thoughts, nor know our own mind, but God is never at any uncertainty within himself. We are sometimes ready to fear that God's designs concerning us are all against us; but he knows the contrary concerning his own people, that they are *thoughts of good and not of evil*; even that which seems evil is designed for good. His thoughts are all working towards the expected end, which he will give in due time. The end they expect will come, though perhaps not when they expect it. Let them have patience till the fruit is ripe, and then they shall have it. He will give them *an end, and expectation*, so it is in the original. (1) He will give them to see *the end* (the comfortable termination) of their trouble; though it last long, it shall not last always. *The time to favour Zion, yea, the set time, will come.* When things are at the worst they will begin to mend; and he will give them to see the glorious perfection of their deliverance; for, as for God, his work is perfect. He that in the beginning finished *the heavens and the earth*, and all the *hosts* of both, will finish all the blessings of both to his people. When he begins in ways of mercy he will *make an end.* God does nothing by halves. (2.) He will give them to see the *expectation*, that *end* which they desire and hope for, and have been long waiting for. He will give them, not the expectations of their fears, nor the expectations of their fancies, but the expectations of their faith, the end which he has promised and which will turn for the best to them. 3. This shall be in answer to their prayers and supplications to God, v. 12—14. (1.) God will stir them up to pray: *Then shall you call upon me, and you shall go, and pray unto me.* Note, When God is about to give his people the expected good he pours out a spirit of prayer, and it is a good sign that he is coming towards them in mercy. Then, when you see the *expected end* approaching, *then you shall call upon me.* Note, Promises are given, not to supersede, but to quicken and encourage prayer: and when deliverance is coming we must by prayer go forth to meet it. When Daniel understood that the 70 years were near expiring, then he *set his face* with more fervency than ever to *seek the Lord*, Dan. ix. 2, 3. (2.) He will then stir up himself to come and save them (Ps. lxxx. 2): *I will hearken unto you, and I will be found of you.* God has said it, and we may depend upon it, *Seek and you shall find.* We have a general rule laid down (v. 13): *You shall find me when you shall search for*

*me with all your heart.* In seeking God we must search for him, accomplish a diligent search, search for directions in seeking him and encouragements to our faith and hope. We must continue seeking, and take pains in seeking, as those that search; and this we must do with our heart (that is, in sincerity and uprightness), and with our whole heart (that is, with vigour and fervency, putting forth *all that is within us* in prayer), and those who thus *seek God* shall *find him*, and shall find him their bountiful rewarder, Heb. xi. 6. He never said to such, *Seek you me in vain.*

15 Because ye have said, The LORD hath raised us up prophets in Babylon; 16 *Know* that thus saith the LORD of the king that sitteth upon the throne of David, and of all the people that dwelleth in this city, *and* of your brethren that are not gone forth with you into captivity; 17 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will send upon them the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, and will make them like vile figs, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil. 18 And I will persecute them with the sword, with the famine, and with the pestilence, and will deliver them to be removed to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be a curse, and an astonishment, and a hissing, and a reproach, among all the nations whither I have driven them: 19 Because they have not hearkened to my words, saith the LORD, which I sent unto them by my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending *them*; but ye would not hear, saith the LORD. 20 Hear ye therefore the word of the LORD, all ye of the captivity, whom I have sent from Jerusalem to Babylon: 21 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, of Ahab the son of Kolaiah, and of Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, which prophesy a lie unto you in my name; Behold, I will deliver them into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon; and he shall slay them before your eyes; 22 And of them shall be taken up a curse by all the captivity of Judah which *are* in Babylon, saying, The LORD make thee like Zedekiah and like Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire; 23 Because they



have committed villany in Israel, and have committed adultery with their neighbours' wives, and have spoken lying words in my name, which I have not commanded them; even I know, and *am* a witness, saith the LORD.

Jeremiah, having given great encouragement to those among the captives whom he knew to be serious and well-affected, assuring them that God had very kind and favourable intentions concerning them, here turns to those among them who slighted the counsels and comforts that Jeremiah ministered to them and depended upon what the false prophets flattered them with. When this letter came from Jeremiah they would be ready to say, "Why should he make himself so busy, and take upon him to advise us? *The Lord has raised us up prophets in Babylon*, v. 15. We are satisfied with those prophets, and can depend upon them, and have no occasion to hear from any prophets in Jerusalem." See the impudent wickedness of this people; as the prophets, when they prophesied lies, said that they had them from God, so the people, when they invited those prophets thus to flatter them, fathered it upon God, and said that it was the Lord that raised them up those prophets. Whereas we may be sure that those who harden people in their sins, and deceive them with false and groundless hopes of God's mercy, are no prophets of God's raising up. These prophets of their own told them that no more should be carried captive, but that those who were in captivity should shortly return. Now, in answer to this, 1. The prophet here foretels the utter destruction of those who remained still at Jerusalem, notwithstanding what those false prophets said to the contrary: "As for the *king* and *people* that *dwell in the city*, who, you think, will be ready to bid you welcome when you return, you are deceived; they shall be followed with one judgment after another, *sword, famine, and pestilence*, which shall cut off multitudes; and the poor and miserable remains shall be *removed into all kingdoms of the earth*," v. 16, 18. And thus God *will make them*, or rather deal with them, *like vile figs*; they have made themselves so by their wickedness, and God will use them accordingly, as the salt that has *lost its savour*, which, being good for nothing, is cast to the dunghill, and so are rotten figs. This refers to the vision and the prophecy upon it which we had *ch. xxiv*. And the reason given for these proceedings against them is the same that has often been given and will justify God in the eternal ruin of impenitent sinners (v. 19): *Because they have not hearkened to my words. I called, but they refused*. 2. He foretels the judgment of God upon the false prophets in Babylon, who deceived the people of God there. He calls upon all

the children of the captivity, who boasted of them as prophets of God's raising up (v. 20): "Stand still, and hear the doom of the prophets you are so fond of." The two prophets are named here, *Ahab* and *Zedekiah*, v. 21. Observe, (1.) The crimes charged upon them—impiety and immorality: *They prophesied lies in God's name* (v. 21), and again (v. 23), *They have spoken lying words in my name*. Lying was bad, lying to the people of God to delude them into a false hope was worse, but fathering their lies upon the God of truth was worst of all. And no marvel if those that had the face to do that could allow themselves in the gratification of those vile affections to which God, in a way of righteous judgment, *gave them up*. They have done *villany in Israel*, for they have committed adultery with their neighbours' wives. Adultery is villany, and it is an aggravation of it if it be villany in Israel, and in such as pretend to be prophets, who by such wickednesses manifestly disprove their own pretensions. God never sent such profligate wretches on his errands. He is the *Lord God of the holy prophets*, not of such impure ones. Here it appears why they flattered others in their sins—because they could not reprove them without condemning themselves. These lewd practices of theirs they knew how to conceal from the eye of the world, that they might preserve their credit; but *I know it and am a witness, saith the Lord*. The most secret sins are known to God; he can see the villany that is covered with the thickest cloak of hypocrisy, and there is a day coming when he will bring to light all these hidden works of darkness and every man will appear in his own colours. (2.) The judgments threatened against them: *The king of Babylon shall slay them before your eyes*; nay, he shall put them to a miserable death, *roast them in the fire*, v. 22. We may suppose that it was not for their impiety and immorality that Nebuchadnezzar punished them thus severely, but for sedition, and some attempts of their turbulent spirits upon the public peace, and stirring up the people to revolt and rebel. So much of their wickedness shall then be detected, and in such a wretched manner they shall end their days, that their names shall be a curse among the captives in Babylon, v. 22. When men would imprecate the greatest evil upon one they hated they would think they could not load them with a heavier curse, in fewer words, than to say, *The Lord make thee like Zedekiah and like Ahab*. Thus were they made ashamed of the prophets they had been proud of, and convinced at last of their folly in hearkening to them. God's faithful prophets were sometimes charged with being the troublers of the land, and as such were tortured and slain; but their names were a blessing when they were gone and their memory sweet, not as these false prophets. As malefactors are attended

with infamy and disgrace, so martyrs with glory and honour.

24 Thus shalt thou also speak to Shemaiah the Nehelamite, saying, 25 Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, saying, Because thou hast sent letters in thy name unto all the people that are at Jerusalem, and to Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest, and to all the priests, saying, 26 The LORD hath made thee priest in the stead of Jehoiada the priest, that ye should be officers in the house of the LORD, for every man that is mad, and maketh himself a prophet, that thou shouldst put him in prison, and in the stocks. 27 Now therefore why hast thou not reproved Jeremiah of Anathoth, which maketh himself a prophet to you? 28 For therefore he sent unto us in Babylon, saying, This captivity is long: build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them. 29 And Zephaniah the priest read this letter in the ears of Jeremiah the prophet. 30 Then came the word of the LORD unto Jeremiah, saying, 31 Send to all them of the captivity, saying, Thus saith the LORD concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite; because that Shemaiah hath prophesied unto you, and I sent him not, and he caused you to trust in a lie: 32 Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite, and his seed: he shall not have a man to dwell among this people; neither shall he behold the good that I will do for my people, saith the LORD; because he hath taught rebellion against the LORD.

We have perused the contents of Jeremiah's letter to the captives in Babylon, who had reason, with a great deal of thanks to God and him, to acknowledge the receipt of it, and lay it up among their treasures. But we cannot wonder if the false prophets they had among them were enraged at it; for it gave them their true character. Now here we are told concerning one of them,

I. How he manifested his malice against Jeremiah. This busy fellow is called *Shemaiah the Nehelamite, the dreamer* (so the margin reads it), because all his prophecies he pretended to have received from God in a dream. He had got a copy of Jeremiah's

letter to the captives, or had heard it read, or information was given to him concerning it, and it nettled him exceedingly; and he will take pen in hand, and answer it, yea, that he will. But how? He does not write to Jeremiah in justification of his own mission, nor offer any rational arguments for the support of his prophecies concerning the speedy return of the captives; but he writes to the priests, those faithful patrons of the false prophets, and instigates them to persecute Jeremiah. He writes in his own name, not so much as pretending to have the people's consent to it; but, as if he must be dictator to all mankind, he sends a circular letter (as it should seem) among the priests at Jerusalem and the rest of the people, probably by the same messengers that brought the letter from Jeremiah. But it is chiefly directed to Zephaniah, who was either the immediate son of Maaseiah, or of the 24th course of the priests, of which Maaseiah was the father and head. He was not the high priest, but sagan or suffragan to the high priest, or in some other considerable post of command in the temple, as Pashur, *ch. xx. 1*. Perhaps he was chairman of that committee of priests that was appointed in a particular manner to take cognizance of those that pretended to be prophets, of which there were very many at this time, and to give judgment concerning them. Now, 1. He puts him and the other priests in mind of the duty of their place (*v. 26*): *The Lord hath made thee priest instead of Jehoiada the priest*. Some think that he refers to the famous Jehoiada, that great reformer in the days of Joash; and (says Mr. Gataker) he would insinuate that this Zephaniah is for spirit and zeal such another as he, and raised up, as he was, for the glory of God and the good of the church; and therefore it was expected from him that he should proceed against Jeremiah. Thus (says he) there is no act so injurious or impious, but that wicked wretches and false prophets will not only attempt it, but colour it also with some specious pretence of piety and zeal for God's glory, *Isa. lxvi. 5*; *John xvi. 2*. Or, rather, it was some other Jehoiada, his immediate predecessor in this office, who perhaps was carried to Babylon among the priests, *v. 1*. Zephaniah is advanced, sooner than he expected, to this place of trust and power, and Shemaiah would have him think that Providence had preferred him that he might persecute God's prophets, that he had come to this government for such a time as this, and that he was unjust and ungrateful if he did not thus improve his power, or, rather, abuse it. Their hearts are wretchedly hardened who can justify the doing of mischief by their having a power to do it. These priests' business was to examine every man that is mad and makes himself a prophet. God's faithful prophets are here represented as prophets of their own making, usurpers of



the office, and lay-intruders, as men that were mad, actuated by some demon, and not divinely inspired, or as distracted men and men in a frenzy. Thus the characters of the false prophets are thrown upon the true ones; and, if this had been indeed their character, they would have deserved to be bound as madmen and punished as pretenders, and therefore he concludes that Jeremiah must be so treated. He does not bid them examine whether Jeremiah could produce any proofs of his mission and could make it to appear that he was not mad. No; that is taken for granted, and, when once he has had a bad name given him, he must be run down of course. 2. He informs them of the letter which Jeremiah had written to the captives (v. 28): *He sent unto us in Babylon, with the authority of a prophet, saying, This captivity is long, and therefore resolve to make the best of it. And what harm was there in this, that it should be objected to him as a crime? The false prophets had formerly said that the captivity would never come, ch. xiv. 13. Jeremiah had said that it would come, and the event had already proved him in the right, which obliged them to give credit to him who now said that it would be long, rather than to those who said that it would be short, but had once before been found liars. 3. He demands judgment against him, taking it for granted that he is mad, and makes himself a prophet. He expects that they will order him to be put in prison and in the stocks (v. 26), that they will thus punish him, and by putting him to disgrace possess the people with prejudices against him, ruin his reputation, and so prevent the giving of any credit to his prophecies at Jerusalem, hoping that, if they could gain that point, the captives in Babylon would not be influenced by him. Nay, he takes upon him to chide Zephaniah for his neglect (v. 27): *Why hast thou not rebuked and restrained Jeremiah of Anathoth?* See how insolent and imperious these false prophets had grown, that, though they were in captivity, they would give law to the priests who were not only at liberty, but in power. It is common for those that pretend to more knowledge than their neighbours to be thus assuming. Now here is a remarkable instance of the hardness of the hearts of sinners, and it is enough to make us all fear lest our hearts be at any time hardened. For here we find, (1.) That these sinners would not be convinced by the clearest evidence. God had confirmed his word in the mouth of Jeremiah; it had taken hold of them (Zech. i. 6); and yet, because he does not prophesy to them the smooth things they desired, they are resolved to look upon him as not duly called to the office of a prophet. None so blind as those that will not see. (2.) That they would not be reclaimed and reformed by the most severe chastisement. They were now sent*

into a miserable thralldom for mocking the messengers of the Lord and misusing his prophets. This was the sin for which God now contended with them; and yet in their distress they trespass yet more against the Lord, 2 Chron. xxviii. 22. This very sin they are notoriously guilty of in their captivity, which shows that afflictions will not of themselves cure men of their sins, unless the grace of God work with them, but will rather exasperate the corruptions they are intended to mortify; so true is that of Solomon (Prov. xxvii. 22), *Though thou shouldst bray a fool in a mortar, yet will not his foolishness depart from him.*

II. How Jeremiah came to the knowledge of this (v. 29): *Zephaniah read this letter in the ears of Jeremiah.* He did not design to do as Shemaiah would have him, but, as it should seem, had a respect for Jeremiah (for we find him employed in messages to him as a prophet, ch. xxi. 1, xxxvii. 3), and therefore protected him. He that continued in his dignity and power stood more in awe of God and his judgments than he that was now a captive. Nay, he made Jeremiah acquainted with the contents of the letter, that he might see what enemies he had even among the captives. Note, It is kindness to our friends to let them know their foes.

III. What was the sentence passed upon Shemaiah for writing this letter. God sent him an answer, for to him Jeremiah committed his cause: it was ordered to be sent not to him, but to those of the captivity, who encouraged and countenanced him as if he had been a prophet of God's raising up, r. 31, 32. Let them know, 1. That Shemaiah had made fools of them. He promised them peace in God's name, but God did not send him; he forged a commission, and counterfeited the broad seal of Heaven to it, and made the people to trust in a lie, and by preaching false comfort to them deprived them of true comfort. Nay, he had not only made fools of them, but, which was worse, he had made traitors of them; he had taught rebellion against the Lord, as Hananiah had done, ch. xxviii. 16. And, if vengeance shall be taken on those that rebel, much more on those that teach rebellion by their doctrine and example. 2. That at his end he shall also be a fool (as the expression is, ch. xvii. 11); his name and family shall be extinct and shall be buried in oblivion; he shall leave no issue behind him to bear up his name; his pedigree shall end in him: *He shall not have a man to dwell among this people; and neither he nor any that come from him shall behold the good that I will do for my people.* Note, Those are unworthy to share in God's favours to his church that are not willing to stay his time for them. Shemaiah was angry at Jeremiah's advice to the captives to see to the building up of their families in Babylon, that they might be increased and not diminished.

nished, and therefore justly is he written childless there. Those that slight the blessings of God's word deserve to lose the benefit of them. See Amos vii. 16, 17.

## CHAP. XXX.

The sermon which we have in this and the following chapter is of a very different complexion from all those before. The prophet does indeed, by direction from God, change his voice. Most of what he has said hitherto was by way of reproof and threatening, but these two chapters are wholly taken up with precious promises of a return out of captivity, and that typical of the glorious things reserved for the church in the days of the Messiah. The prophet is told not only to preach this, but to write it, because it is intended for the comfort of the generation to come, ver. 1-3. It is here promised, I. That they should hereafter have a joyful restoration, ver. 1. Though they were now in a great deal of pain and terror, ver. 4-7. 2. Though their oppressors were very strong, ver. 8-10. 3. Though a full end was made of other nations, and they were not restored, ver. 11. 4. Though all means of their deliverance seemed to fail and be cut off, ver. 12-14. 5. Though God himself had sent them into captivity, and justly, for their sins, ver. 15, 16. 6. Though all about them looked upon their case as desperate, ver. 17. II. That after their joyful restoration they should have a happy settlement, that their city should be rebuilt (ver. 18), their numbers increased (ver. 19, 20), their government established (ver. 21), God's covenant with them renewed (ver. 22), and their enemies destroyed and cut off, ver. 23, 24.

THE word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, 2 Thus speaketh the LORD God of Israel, saying, Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book. 3 For, lo, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the LORD: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it. 4 And these *are* the words that the LORD spake concerning Israel and concerning Judah. 5 For thus saith the LORD; We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. 6 Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness? 7 Alas! for that day *is* great, so that none *is* like it: it *is* even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it. 8 For it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD of hosts, *that* I will break his yoke from off thy neck, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him: 9 But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them.

Here, I. Jeremiah is directed to *write* what God had spoken to him, which perhaps refers to all the foregoing prophecies. He must write them and publish them, in hopes that those who had not profited by what he said upon once hearing it might take more

notice of it when in reading it they had leisure for a more considerate review. Or, rather, it refers to the promises of their enlargement, which had been often mixed with his other discourses. He must collect them and put them together, and God will now add unto them many like words. He must write them for the generations to come, who should see them accomplished, and thereby have their faith in the prophecy confirmed. He must write them not in a *letter*, as that in the chapter before to the captives, but in a *book*, to be carefully preserved in the archives, or among the public rolls or registers of the state. Daniel understood by these books when the captivity was about coming to an end, Dan. ix. 2. He must write them in a book, not in loose papers: "*For the days come*, and are yet at a great distance, when *I will bring again the captivity of Israel and Judah*, great numbers of the ten tribes, with those of the two," v. 3. And this prophecy must be written, that it may be read then also, that so it may appear how exactly the accomplishment answers the prediction, which is one end of the writing of prophecies. It is intimated that they shall be *beloved for their fathers' sake* (Roin. xi. 28); for *therefore* God will bring them again to Canaan, because it was *the land that he gave to their fathers*, which therefore they shall possess.

II. He is directed what to write. The very words are such as the Holy Ghost teaches, v. 4. These are the words which God ordered to be written; and those promises which are written by his order are as truly his word as the ten commandments which were written with his finger. 1. He must write a description of the fright and consternation which the people were now in, and were likely to be still in upon every attack that the Chaldeans made upon them, which will much magnify both the wonder and the welcomeness of their deliverance (v. 5): *We have heard a voice of trembling*—the shrieks of terror echoing to the alarms of danger. The false prophets told them that they should have *peace*, but *there is fear and not peace*, so the margin reads it. No marvel that when *without are fightings within are fears*. The men, even the men of war, shall be quite overwhelmed with the calamities of their nation, shall sink under them, and yield to them, and shall look like *women in labour*, whose pains come upon them in great extremity and they know that they cannot escape them, v. 6. You never heard of a man travelling with child, and yet here you find not here and there a timorous man, but *every man with his hands on his loins*, in the utmost anguish and agony, *as women in travail*, when they see their cities burnt and their countries laid waste. But this pain is compared to that of a woman in travail, not to that of a death-bed, because it shall end in joy at last, and the pain, like that of a travelling woman, shall be forgotten. *Al*



faces shall be turned into paleness. The word signifies not only such paleness as arises from a sudden fright, but that which is the effect of a bad habit of body, the jaundice, or the green sickness. The prophet laments the calamity upon the foresight of it (v. 7): *Alas! for that day is great, a day of judgment, which is called the great day, the great and terrible day of the Lord* (Joel ii. 31, Jude 6), great, so that *there has been none like it*. The last destruction of Jerusalem is thus spoken of by our Saviour as unparalleled, Matt. xxiv. 21. *It is even the time of Jacob's trouble*, a sad time, when God's professing people shall be in distress above other people. The whole time of the captivity was a time of Jacob's trouble; and such times ought to be greatly lamented by all that are concerned for the welfare of Jacob and the honour of the God of Jacob. 2. He must write the assurances which God had given that a happy end should at length be put to these calamities. (1.) Jacob's troubles shall cease: *He shall be saved out of them*. Though the afflictions of the church may last long, they shall not last always. *Salvation belongs to the Lord*, and shall be wrought for his church. (2.) Jacob's troublers shall be disabled from doing him any further mischief, and shall be reckoned with for the mischief they have done him, v. 8. *The Lord of hosts*, who has all power in his hand, undertakes to do it: *"I will break his yoke from off thy neck, which has long lain so heavy, and has so sorely galled thee. I will burst thy bonds and restore thee to liberty and ease, and thou shalt no more be at the beck and command of strangers, shalt no more serve them, nor shall they any more serve themselves of thee; they shall no more enrich themselves either by thy possessions or by thy labours."* And, (3.) That which crowns and completes the mercy is that they shall be restored to the free exercise of their religion again, v. 9. They shall be delivered from serving their enemies, not that they may live at large and do what they please, but that they may *serve the Lord their God and David their king*, that they may come again into order, under the established government both in church and state. Therefore they were brought into trouble and made to *serve their enemies* because they had not *served the Lord their God* as they ought to have done, *with joyfulness and gladness of heart*, Deut. xxviii. 47. But, when the time shall come that they should be *saved out of their trouble*, God will prepare and qualify them for it by giving them a *heart to serve him*, and will make it doubly comfortable by giving them opportunity to serve him. Therefore we are *delivered out of the hands of our enemies*, that we may *serve God*, Luke i. 74, 75. And then deliverances out of temporal calamities are mercies indeed to us when by them we find ourselves engaged to and enlarged in the service of God. They shall serve their

own God, and neither be inclined, as they had been of old in the day of their apostasy, nor compelled, as they had been of late in the day of their captivity, to serve other gods. They shall serve *David their king*, such governors as God should from time to time set over them, of the line of David (as Zerubabel), or at least sitting on the *thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David*, as Nehemiah. But certainly this has a further meaning. The Chaldee paraphrase reads it, *They shall obey (or hearken to) the Messiah (or Christ), the Son of David, their king*. To him the Jewish interpreters apply it. That dispensation which commenced at their return out of captivity brought them to the Messiah. He is called *David their King* because he was the *Son of David* (Matt. xxii. 42) and he answered to the name, Matt. xx. 31, 32. David was an illustrious type of him both in his humiliation and in his exaltation. The covenant of royalty made with David had principal reference to him, and in him the promises of that covenant had their full accomplishment. God gave him the *throne of his father David*; he *raised him up unto them, set him upon the holy hill of Zion*. God is often in the New Testament said to have *raised up Jesus*, raised him up as a King, Acts iii. 26; xiii. 23, 33. Observe, [1.] Those that serve the Lord as their God must also serve *David their King*, must give up themselves to Jesus Christ, to be ruled by him. For all men must *honour the Son as they honour the Father*, and come into the service and worship of God by him as Mediator. [2.] Those that are delivered out of spiritual bondage must make it appear that they are so by giving up themselves to the service of Christ. Those to whom he gives rest must take his yoke upon them.

10 Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the LORD; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid. 11 For I am with thee, saith the LORD, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished. 12 For thus saith the LORD, Thy bruise is incurable, and thy wound is grievous. 13 There is none to plead thy cause, that thou mayest be bound up: thou hast no healing medicines. 14 All thy lovers have forgotten thee; they seek thee not; for I have wound-

ed thee with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one, for the multitude of thine iniquity; *because* thy sins were increased. 15 Why criest thou for thine affliction? thy sorrow *is* incurable for the multitude of thine iniquity: *because* thy sins were increased, I have done these things unto thee. 16 Therefore all they that devour thee shall be devoured; and all thine adversaries, every one of them, shall go into captivity; and they that spoil thee shall be a spoil, and all that prey upon thee will I give for a prey. 17 For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the LORD; because they called thee an Outcast, *saying*, This *is* Zion, whom no man seeketh after.

In these verses, as in those foregoing, the deplorable case of the Jews in captivity is set forth, but many precious promises are given them that in due time they should be relieved and a glorious salvation wrought for them.

I. God himself appeared against them: he *scattered* them (v. 11); he did *all these things unto them*, v. 15. All their calamities came from his hands; whoever were the instruments, he was the principal agent. And this made their case very sad that God, even their own God, spoke concerning them, to pull down and to destroy. Now, 1. This was intended by him as a fatherly chastisement, and no other (v. 11): "*I will correct thee in measure, or according to judgment, with discretion, no more than thou deservest, nay, no more than thou canst well bear.*" What God does against his people is in a way of correction, and that correction is always moderated and always proceeds from love: "*I will not leave thee altogether unpunished*, as thou art ready to think I should, because of thy relation to me." Note, A profession of religion, though ever so plausible, will be far from securing to us impunity in sin. God is no respecter of persons, but will show his hatred of sin wherever he finds it, and that he hates it most in those that are nearest to him. God here corrects his people *for the multitude of their iniquity*, and *because their sins were increased*, v. 14, 15. Are our sorrows multiplied at any time and do they increase? We must acknowledge that it is because our sins have been multiplied and they have increased. Iniquities grow in us, and therefore troubles grow upon us. But, 2. What God intended as a fatherly chastisement they and others interpreted as an act of hostility; they looked upon him as having *wounded them with the*

*wound of an enemy and with the chastisement of a cruel one* (v. 14), as if he had designed their ruin, and neither mitigated the correction nor had any mercy in reserve for them. It did indeed seem as if God had dealt thus severely with them, as if he had turned to be their enemy and had fought against them, Isa. lxiii. 10. Job complains that God had become cruel to him and *multiplied his wounds*. When troubles are great and long we have need carefully to watch over our own hearts, that we entertain not such hard thoughts as these of God and his providence. His are the chastisements of a merciful one, not of a cruel one, whatever they may appear.

II. Their friends forsook them, and were shy of them. None of those who had courted them in their prosperity would take notice of them now in their distress, v. 13. It is commonly thus when families go to decay; those hang off from them that had been their hangers-on. In two cases we are glad of the assistance of our friends and need their service:—1. If we be impeached, accused, or reproached, we expect that our friends should appear in vindication of us, should speak a good word for us when we cannot put on a face to speak for ourselves; but here *there is none to plead thy cause*, none to stand up in thy defence, none to intercede for thee with thy oppressors; therefore God will *plead their cause*, for he might well wonder there was none to uphold a people that had been so much the favourites of Heaven, Isa. lxiii. 5. 2. If we be sick, or sore, or wounded, we expect our friends should attend us, advise us, sympathise with us, and, if occasion be, lend a hand for the applying of healing medicines; but here *there is none to do that*, none to bind up thy wounds, and by counsels and comforts to make proper applications to thy case; nay (v. 14), *All thy lovers have forgotten thee*; out of sight out of mind; instead of seeking thee, they forsake thee. Such as this has often been the case of religion and serious godliness in the world; those that from their education, profession, and hopeful beginnings, one might have expected to be its friends and lovers, its patrons and protectors, desert it, forget it, and have nothing to say in its defence, nor will do any thing towards the healing of its wounds. Observe, *Thy lovers have forgotten thee, for I have wounded thee*. When God is against a people who will be for them? Who can be for them so as to do them any kindness? See Job xxx. 11. Now, upon this account, their case seemed desperate and past relief (v. 12): *Thy bruise is incurable, thy wound grievous*, and (v. 15) *thy sorrow is incurable*. The condition of the Jews in captivity was such as no human power could redress the grievances of; there they were like a valley full of *dead and dry bones*, which nothing less than Omnipotence can put life into. Who could imagine that a people so diminished, so impoverished, should ever be re-



stored to their own land and re-established there? So many were the aggravations of their calamity that their sorrow would not admit of any alleviation, but they seemed to be hardened in it, and their souls refused to be comforted, till divine consolations proved strong ones, too strong to be borne down even by the floods of grief that overwhelmed them. *Thy sorrow is incurable because thy sins, instead of being repented of and forsaken, were increased.* Note, Incurable griefs are owing to incurable lusts. Now in this deplorable condition they are looked upon with disdain (v. 17): *They called thee an outcast, abandoned by all, abandoned to ruin; they said, This is Zion, whom no man seeks after.* When they looked on the place where the city and temple had been built they called that an outcast; now all was in ruins, there was no resort to it, no residence in it, none asked the way to Zion, as formerly; *no man seeks after it.* When they looked on the people that formerly dwelt in Zion, but were now in captivity (and we read of *Zion dwelling with the daughter of Babylon*, Zech. ii. 7), they called them outcasts; these are those who belong to Zion, and are wont to talk much of it and weep at the remembrance of it, but *no man seeks after them*, or enquires concerning them. Note, It is often the lot of Zion to be deserted and despised by those about her.

III. For all this God will work deliverance and salvation for them in due time. Though no other hand, nay, *because* no other hand, can cure their wound, his will, and shall. 1. Though he seemed to stand at a distance from them, yet he assures them of his presence with them, his powerful and gracious presence: *I will save thee*, v. 10. *I am with thee, to save thee*, v. 11. When they are in their troubles he is with them, to save them from sinking under them; when the time has come for their deliverance he is with them, to be ready, upon the first opportunity, to save them out of their trouble. 2. Though they were at a distance, remote from their own land, *afar off in the land of their captivity*, yet there shall salvation find them out, thence shall it fetch them, them and their seed, for they also shall be known among the Gentiles, and distinguished from them, that they may return, v. 10. 3. Though they were now full of fears, and continually alarmed, yet the time shall come when they shall be in rest and quiet, safe and easy, and none shall make them afraid, v. 10. 4. Though the nations into which they were dispersed should be brought to ruin, yet they should be preserved from that ruin (v. 11): *Though I make a full end of the nations whither I have scattered thee, and there might be danger of thy being lost among them, yet I will not make a full end of thee.* It was promised that in the peace of these nations they should have peace (ch. xxix. 7), and yet in the destruction of these nations they

should escape destruction. God's church may sometimes be brought very low, but he *will not make a full end of it*, ch. v. 10, 18.

5. Though God correct them, and justly, for their sins, their manifold transgressions and mighty sins, yet he will return in mercy to them, and even their sin shall not prevent their deliverance when God's time shall come. 6. Though their adversaries were mighty, God will bring them down, and break their power (v. 16): *All that devour thee shall be devoured*, and thus Zion's cause will be pleaded and will be made to appear to all the world a righteous cause. Thus Zion's deliverance will be brought about by the destruction of her oppressors; and thus her enemies will be recompensed for all the injury they have done her; for *there is a God that judges in the earth, a God to whom vengeance belongs.* "They shall every one of them, without exception, go into captivity, and the day will come when those that now spoil thee shall be a spoil." Those that lead into captivity shall go into captivity, Rev. xiii. 10. This might serve to oblige the present conquerors to use their captives well, because the wheel would turn round, and the day would come when they also should be captives, and let them do now as they would then be done by. 7. Though the wound seem incurable, God will make a cure of it (v. 17): *I will restore health unto thee.* Be the disease ever so dangerous, the patient is safe if God undertakes the cure.

IV. Upon the whole matter, they are cautioned against inordinate fear and grief, for in these precious promises there is enough to silence both. 1. They must not tremble as those that have no hope in the apprehension of future further trouble that might threaten them (v. 10): *Fear thou not, O my servant Jacob! neither be dismayed.* Note, Those that are God's servants must not give way to disquieting fears, whatever difficulties and dangers may be before them. 2. They must not sorrow as those that have no hope for the troubles which at present they lie under, v. 15. "Why criest thou for thy affliction? It is true thy carnal confidences fail thee, creatures are physicians of no value, but *I will heal thy wound*, and therefore, *Why criest thou?* Why dost thou fret and complain thus? It is for thy sin (v. 14, 15), and therefore, instead of repining, thou shouldst be repenting. *Wherefore should a man complain for the punishment of his sins?* The issue will be good at last, and therefore rejoice in hope."

18 Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I will bring again the captivity of Jacob's tents, and have mercy on his dwelling-places; and the city shall be builded upon her own heap, and the palace shall remain after the manner thereof. 19 And out of them shall proceed

thanksgiving and the voice of them that make merry: and I will multiply them, and they shall not be few; I will also glorify them, and they shall not be small. 20 Their children also shall be as aforetime, and their congregation shall be established before me, and I will punish all that oppress them. 21 And their nobles shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them; and I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach unto me: for who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the LORD. 22 And ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. 23 Behold, the whirlwind of the LORD goeth forth with fury, a continuing whirlwind: it shall fall with pain upon the head of the wicked. 24 The fierce anger of the LORD shall not return, until he have done *it*, and until he have performed the intents of his heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it.

We have here further intimations of the favour God had in reserve for them after the days of their calamity were over. It is promised,

I. That the city and temple should be rebuilt, *v. 18.* *Jacob's tents, and his dwelling-places*, felt the effects of the captivity, for they lay in ruins when the inhabitants were carried away captives; but, when they have returned, the habitations shall be repaired, and raised up out of their ruins, and therein God will have mercy upon their dwelling-places, that had been monuments of his justice. Then the city of Jerusalem shall be built upon her own heap, her own hill, though now it be no better than a ruinous heap. The situation was unexceptionable, and therefore it shall be rebuilt upon the same spot of ground. He that can make of a city a heap (*Isa. xxv. 2*) can when he pleases make of a heap a city again. The palace (the temple, God's palace) shall remain after the manner thereof; it shall be built after the old model; and the service of God shall be constantly kept up there and attended as formerly.

II. That the sacred feasts should again be solemnized (*v. 19*): Out of the city, and the temple, and all the dwelling-places of Jacob, shall proceed thanksgiving and the voice of those that make merry. They shall go with expressions of joy to the temple service, and with the like shall return from it. Observe, The voice of thanksgiving is the same with the voice of those that make merry; for whatever is the matter of our joy should be the

matter of our praise. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms. What makes us cheerful should make us thankful. Serve the Lord with gladness.

III. That the people should be multiplied, and increased, and made considerable: They shall not be few, they shall not be small, but shall become numerous and illustrious, and make a figure among the nations; for I will multiply them and I will glorify them. It is for the honour of the church to have many added to it that shall be saved. This would make them be of some weight among their neighbours. Let a people be ever so much diminished and despised, God can multiply and glorify them. They shall be restored to their former honour: Their children shall be as aforetime, playing in the streets (*Zech. viii. 5*); they shall inherit their parents' estates and honours as formerly; and their congregation shall, both in civil and sacred things, be established before me. There shall be a constant succession of faithful magistrates in the congregation of the elders, to establish that, and of faithful worshippers in the congregation of the saints. As one generation passes away another shall be raised up, and so the congregation shall be established before God.

IV. That they shall be blessed with a good government (*v. 21*): Their nobles and judges shall be of themselves, of their own nation, and they shall no longer be ruled by strangers and enemies; their governor shall proceed from the midst of them, shall be one that has been a sharer with them in the afflictions of their captive state; and this has reference to Christ our governor, David our King (*v. 9*); he is of ourselves, in all things made like unto his brethren. And I will cause him to draw near; this may be understood either, 1. Of the people, Jacob and Israel: "I will cause them to draw near to me in the temple service, as formerly, to come into covenant with me, as my people (*v. 22*), to approach to me in communion; for who hath engaged his heart, made a covenant with it, and brought it into bonds, to approach unto me?" How few are there that do so! None can do it but by the special grace of God causing them to draw near. Note, Whenever we approach to God in any holy ordinance we must engage our hearts to do it; the heart must be prepared for the duty, employed in it, and kept closely to it. The heart is the main thing that God looks at and requires; but it is deceitful, and will start aside if a great deal of care and pains be not taken to engage it, to bind this sacrifice with cords. Or, 2. It may be understood of the governor; for it is a single person that is spoken of: Their governor shall be duly called to his office, shall draw near to God to consult him upon all occasions. God will cause him to approach to him, for, otherwise, who would engage to take care of so weak a people, and let this ruin come un-



der their hand? But when God has work to do, though attended with many discouragements, he will raise up instruments to do it. But it looks further, to Christ, to him as Mediator. Note, (1.) The proper work and office of Christ, as Mediator, is *to draw near and approach unto God*, not for himself only, but for us, and in our name and stead, as the high priest of our profession. The priests are said to draw nigh to God, Lev. x. 3; xxi. 17. *Moses drew near*, Exod. xx. 21. (2.) God the Father did *cause Jesus Christ thus to draw near and approach to him as Mediator*. He commanded and appointed him to do it; he sanctified and sealed him, anointed him for this purpose, accepted him, and declared himself well pleased in him. (3.) Jesus Christ, being caused by the Father to approach unto him as Mediator, did *engage his heart to do it*, that is, he bound and obliged himself to it, *undertook for his heart* (so some read it), for his soul, that, in the fulness of time, it should be *made an offering for sin*. His own voluntary undertaking, in compliance with his Father's will and in compassion to fallen man, engaged him, and then his own honour kept him to it. It also intimates that he was hearty and resolute, free and cheerful, in it, and made nothing of the difficulties that lay in his way, Isa. lxiii. 3—5. (4.) Jesus Christ was, in all this, truly wonderful. We may well ask, with admiration, *Who is this that thus engages his heart to such an undertaking?*

V. That they shall be taken again into covenant with God, according to the covenant made with their fathers (v. 22): *You shall be my people*; and it is God's good work in us that makes us *to him a people, a people for his name*, Acts xv. 14. *I will be your God*. It is his good-will to us that is the summary of that part of the covenant.

VI. That their enemies shall be reckoned with and brought down (v. 20): *I will punish all those that oppress them*, so that it shall appear to all a dangerous thing to *touch God's anointed*, Ps. cv. 15. The last two verses come under this head. *The whirlwind of the Lord shall fall with pain upon the head of the wicked*. These two verses we had before (ch. xxiii. 19, 20); *there they were a denunciation of God's wrath against the wicked hypocrites in Israel; here against the wicked oppressors of Israel*. The expressions, exactly agreeing, speak the same with that (Isa. li. 22, 23), *I will take the cup of trembling out of thy hand and put it into the hand of those that afflict thee*. The wrath of God against the wicked is here represented to be, 1. Very terrible, like a whirlwind, surprising and irresistible. 2. Very grievous. *It shall fall with pain upon their heads*; they shall be as much hurt as frightened. 3. It shall pursue them. Whirlwinds are usually short, but this shall be *a continuing whirlwind*. 4. It shall accomplish that

for which it is sent: *The anger of the Lord shall not return till he have done it*. The purposes of his wrath, as well as the purposes of his love, will all be fulfilled; he will *perform the intents of his heart*. 5. Those that will not lay this to heart now will then be unable to put off the thoughts of it: *In the latter days you shall consider it*, when it will be too late to prevent it.

## CHAP. XXXI.

This chapter goes on with the good words and comfortable words which we had in the chapter before, for the encouragement of the captives, assuring them that God would in due time restore them or their children to their own land, and make them a great and happy nation again, especially by sending them the Messiah, in whose kingdom and grace many of these promises were to have their full accomplishment. 1. They shall be restored to peace and honour, and joy and great plenty, ver. 1—14. 2. Their sorrow for the loss of their children shall be at an end, ver. 15—17. 3. They shall repent of their sins, and God will graciously accept them in their repentance, ver. 18—20. 4. They shall be multiplied and increased, both their children and their cattle, and not be cut off and diminished as they had been, ver. 21—30. 5. God will renew his covenant with them, and enrich it with spiritual blessings, ver. 31—34. 6. These blessings shall be secured to theirs after them, even to the spiritual seed of Israel for ever, ver. 35—37. 7. As an earnest of this the city of Jerusalem shall be rebuilt, ver. 38—40. These exceedingly great and precious promises were firm foundations of hope and full fountains of joy to the poor captives; and we also may apply them to ourselves and mix faith with them.

AT the same time, saith the LORD, will I be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people. 2 Thus saith the LORD, The people *which were* left of the sword found grace in the wilderness; *even* Israel, when I went to cause him to rest. 3 The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, *saying*, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee. 4 Again I will build thee, and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel: thou shalt again be adorned with thy tabrets, and shalt go forth in the dances of them that make merry. 5 Thou shalt yet plant vines upon the mountains of Samaria: the planters shall plant, and shall eat *them* as common things. 6 For there shall be a day, *that* the watchmen upon the mount Ephraim shall cry, Arise ye, and let us go up to Zion unto the LORD our God. 7 For thus the LORD; Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations: publish ye, praise ye, and say, O LORD, save thy people, the remnant of Israel. 8 Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, *and* with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her that travaileth with child together: a great

company shall return thither. 9 They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born.

God here assures his people,

I. That he will again take them into a covenant relation to himself, from which they seemed to be cut off. *At the same time*, when God's anger breaks out against the wicked (*ch. xxx. 24*), his own people shall be owned by him as the children of his love: *I will be the God* (that is, I will show myself to be the God) *of all the families of Israel* (*v. 1*).—not of the two tribes only, but of all the tribes,—not of the house of Aaron only, and the families of Levi, but of all their families; not only their state in general, but their particular families, and the interests of them, shall have the benefit of a special relation to God. Note, The families of good people, in their family capacity, may apply to God and stay themselves upon him as their God. If we and our houses serve the Lord, we and our houses shall be protected and blessed by him, *Prov. iii. 33*.

II. That he will do for them, in bringing them out of Babylon, as he had done for their fathers when he delivered them out of Egypt, and as he had purposed to do when he first took them to be his people. 1. He puts them in mind of what he did for their fathers when he brought them out of Egypt, *v. 2*. They were then, as these were, a *people left of the sword*, that sword of Pharaoh with which he cut off all the male children as soon as they were born (a bloody sword indeed they had narrowly escaped) and that sword with which he threatened to cut them off when he pursued them to the Red Sea. They were then *in the wilderness*, where they seemed to be lost and forgotten, as these were now in a strange land, and yet they found grace in God's sight, were owned and highly honoured by him, and blessed with wonderful instances of his peculiar favour, and he was at this time going *to cause them to rest* in Canaan. Note, When we are brought very low, and insuperable difficulties appear in the way of our deliverance, it is good to remember that it has been so with the church formerly, and yet that it has been raised up from its low estate and has got to Canaan through all the hardships of a wilderness; and God is still the same. 2. They put him in mind of what God had done for their fathers, intimating that they now saw not such signs, and were ready to ask, as Gideon did, *Where are all the wonders that our fathers told us of?* It is true, *The Lord hath appeared of old unto me* (*v. 3*), in Egypt, in the wilderness, hath ap-

peared with me and for me, hath been seen in his glory as my God. The years of ancient times were glorious years; but now it is otherwise; what good will it do us that he *appeared of old* to us when now he is a *God that hides himself* from us? *Isa. xlv. 15*. Note, It is hard to take comfort from former smiles under present frowns. 3. To this he answers with an assurance of the constancy of his love: *Yea, I have loved thee*, not only with an ancient love, but *with an everlasting love*, a love that shall never fail, however the comforts of it may for a time be suspended. It is an *everlasting love*; therefore *have I extended or drawn out lovingkindness unto thee* also, as well as to thy ancestors, or, *with lovingkindness have I drawn thee* to myself as thy God, from all the idols to which thou hadst turned aside. Note, It is the happiness of those who are through grace interested in the love of God that it is an *everlasting love* (from everlasting in the counsels of it, to everlasting in the continuance and consequences of it), and that nothing can separate them from that love. Those whom God loves with this love he will draw into covenant and communion with himself, by the influences of his Spirit upon their souls; he will *draw them with lovingkindness*, with the cords of a man and bands of love, than which no attractive can be more powerful.

III. That he will again form them into a people, and give them a very joyful settlement in their own land, *v. 4, 5*. Is the church of God his house, his temple? Is it now in ruins? It is so; but, *Again I will build thee, and thou shalt be built*. Are the parts of this building dispersed? They shall be collected and put together again, each in its place. If God undertake to build them, they shall be built, whatever opposition may be given to it? Is *Israel* a beautiful virgin? Is she now stripped of her ornaments and reduced to a melancholy state? She is so; but *thou shalt again be adorned* and made fine, adorned *with thy tabrets*, or timbrels, the ornaments of thy chamber, and made merry. They shall resume their harps which had been hung upon the willow-trees, shall tune them, and shall themselves be in tune to make use of them. They shall be adorned with their tabrets, for now their mirth and music shall be seasonable; it shall be a proper time for it, God in his providence shall call them to it, and then it shall be an ornament to them; whereas tabrets, at a time of common calamity, when God called to mourning, were a shame to them. Or it may refer to their use of tabrets in the solemnizing of their religious feasts and their *going forth in dances* then, as the *daughters of Shiloh*, *Judg. xxi. 19, 21*. Our mirth is then indeed an ornament to us when we serve God and honour him with it. Is the joy of the city maintained by the products of the country? It is so; and there-



fore it is promised (v. 5), *Thou shalt yet plant vines upon the mountains of Samaria*, which had been the head city of the kingdom of Israel, in opposition to that of Judah; but they shall now be united (Ezek. xxxvii. 22), and there shall be such perfect peace and security that men shall apply themselves wholly to the improvement of their ground: *The planters shall plant*, not fearing the soldiers' coming to eat the fruits of what they had planted, or to pluck it up; but they themselves *shall eat them freely, as common things*, not forbidden fruits, not forbidden by the law of God (as they were till the fifth year, Lev. xix. 23—25), not forbidden by the owners, because there shall be such plenty as to yield enough for all, enough for each.

IV. That they shall have liberty and opportunity to worship God in the ordinances of his own appointment, and shall have both invitations and inclinations to do so (v. 6): *There shall be a day*, and a glorious day it will be, when *the watchmen upon Mount Ephraim*, that are set to stand sentinel there, to give notice of the approach of the enemy, finding that all is very quiet and that there is no appearance of danger, shall desire for a time to be discharged from their post, that they may *go up to Zion*, to praise God for the public peace. Or *the watchmen* that tend the vineyards (spoken of v. 5) shall stir up themselves, and one another, and all their neighbours, to go and keep the solemn feasts at Jerusalem. Now this implies that the service of God shall be again set up in Zion, that there shall be a general resort to it, with much affection and mutual excitement, as in David's time, Ps. cxxii. 1. But that which is most observable here is *that the watchmen of Ephraim* are forward to promote the worship of God at Jerusalem, whereas formerly *the watchman of Ephraim was hatred against the house of his God* (Hos. ix. 8), and, instead of inviting people to Zion, laid snares for those that set their faces thitherward, Hos. v. 1. Note, God can make those who have been enemies to religion and the true worship of God to become encouragers of them and leaders in them. This promise was to have its full accomplishment in the days of the Messiah, when the gospel should be preached to all these countries, and a general invitation thereby given into the church of Christ, of which Zion was a type.

V. That God shall have the glory and the church both the honour and comfort of this blessed change (v. 7): *Sing with gladness for Jacob*, that is, let all her friends and well-wishers rejoice with her, Deut. xxxii. 43. *Rejoice, you Gentiles with his people*, Rom. xv. 10. The restoration of Jacob will be taken notice of by all the neighbours, it will be matter of joy to them all, and they shall all join with Jacob in his joys, and thereby pay him respect and put a reputation upon him. Even *the chief of the nations*, that make the greatest figure, shall think it an

honour to them to congratulate the restoration of Jacob, and shall do themselves the honour to send their ambassadors on that errand. *Publish you, praise you*. In publishing these tidings, praise the God of Israel, praise the Israel of God, speak honourably of both. The publishers of the gospel must publish it with praise, and therefore it is often spoken of in the *Psalms* as mingled with praises, Ps. lxxvii. ii. 3; xcvi. 2, 3. What we either bring to others or take to ourselves the comfort of we must be sure to give God the praise of. *Praise you, and say, O Lord! save thy people*; that is, perfect their salvation, go on to save the remnant of Israel, that are yet in bondage; as Ps. cxxvi. 3, 4. Note, When we are praising God for what he has done we must call upon him for the future favours which his church is in need and expectation of; and in praying to him we really praise him and give him glory; he takes it so.

VI. That, in order to a happy settlement in their own land, they shall have a joyful return out of the land of their captivity and a very comfortable passage homeward (v. 8, 9), and this beginning of mercy shall be to them a pledge of all the other blessings here promised. 1. Though they are scattered to places far remote, yet they shall be brought together *from the north country, and from the coasts of the earth*; wherever they are, God will find them out. 2. Though many of them are very unfit for travel, yet that shall be no hindrance to them: *The blind and the lame shall come*; such a good-will shall they have to their journey, and such a good heart upon it, that they shall not make their blindness and lameness an excuse for staying where they are. Their companions will be ready to help them, will be *eyes to the blind and legs to the lame*, as good Christians ought to be to one another in their travels heavenward, Job xxix. 15. But, above all, their God will help them; and let none plead that he is blind who has God for his guide, or lame who has God for his strength. *The women with child* are heavy, and it is not fit that they should undertake such a journey, much less those that *travail with child*; and yet, when it is to return to Zion, neither the one nor the other shall make any difficulty of it. Note, When God calls we must not plead any inability to come; for he that calls us will help us, will strengthen us. 3. Though they seem to be diminished, and to have become few in numbers, yet, when they come all together, they shall be a *great company*; and so will God's spiritual Israel be when there shall be a general rendezvous of them, though now they are but a little flock. 4. Though their return will be matter of joy to them, yet prayers and tears will be both their stores and their artillery (v. 9): *They shall come with weeping and with supplications*, weeping for sin, supplication for pardon; for *the goodness of God shall lead them to repentance*:

and they shall weep with more bitterness and more tenderness for sin, when they are delivered out of their captivity, than ever they did when they were groaning under it. Weeping and praying do well together; tears put life into prayers, and express the liveliness of them, and prayers help to wipe away tears. *With favours will I lead them* (so the margin reads it); in their journey they shall be compassed with God's favours, the fruits of his favour. 5. Though they have a perilous journey, yet they shall be safe under a divine convoy. Is the country they pass through dry and thirsty? *I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters*, not the waters of a land-flood, which fail in summer. Is it a wilderness where there is no road, no track? *I will cause them to walk in a straight way*, which they shall not miss. Is it a rough and rocky country? *Yet they shall not stumble*. Note, Whithersoever God gives his people a clear call he will either find them or make them a ready way; and while we are following Providence we may be sure that Providence will not be wanting to us. And, *lastly*, here is a reason given why God will take all this care of his people: *For I am a Father to Israel*, a Father that begat him, and therefore will maintain him, that have the care and compassion of a father for him (Ps. ciii. 13); and *Ephraim is my first-born*; even Ephraim, who, having gone astray from God, was *no more worthy to be called a son*, shall yet be owned as a *first-born*, particularly dear, and heir of a double portion of blessings. The same reason that was given for their release out of Egypt is given for their release out of Babylon; they are free-born and therefore must not be enslaved, are born to God and therefore must not be the servants of men. Exod. iv. 22, 23, *Israel is my son, even my first-born; let my son go that he may serve me*. If we take God for our Father, and join ourselves to the church of the first-born, we may be assured that we shall want nothing that is good for us.

10 Hear the word of the LORD, O ye nations, and declare *it* in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd *doth* his flock. 11 For the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of *him that was* stronger than he. 12 Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the LORD, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd: and their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all. 13 Then

shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, both young men and old together: for I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow. 14 And I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, saith the LORD. 15 Thus saith the LORD; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, *and* bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they *were* not. 16 Thus saith the LORD; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the LORD; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. 17 And there is hope in thine end, saith the LORD, that thy children shall come again to their own border.

This paragraph is much to the same purport with the last, publishing to the world, as well as to the church, the purposes of God's love concerning his people. This is a *word of the Lord* which the nations must hear, for it is a prophecy of a work of the Lord which the nations cannot but take notice of. Let them hear the prophecy, that they may the better understand and improve the performance; and let those that hear it themselves declare it to others, *declare it in the isles afar off*. It will be a piece of news that will spread all the world over. It will look very great in history; let us see how it looks in prophecy.

It is foretold, 1. That those who are dispersed shall be brought together again from their dispersions: *He that scattereth Israel will gather him*; for he knows whither he scattered them and therefore where to find them, v. 10. *Una eademque manus vulnus opemque tulit—The hand that inflicted the wound shall heal it*. And when he has gathered him into one body, one fold, he will *keep him, as a shepherd does his flock*, from being scattered again. 2. That those who are sold and alienated shall be redeemed and brought back, v. 11. Though the enemy that had got possession of him was *stronger than he*, yet the Lord, who is stronger than all, *has redeemed and ransomed him*, not by price, but by power, as of old out of the Egyptians' hands. 3. That with their liberty they shall have plenty and joy, and God shall be honoured and served with it, v. 12, 13. When they shall have returned to their own land *they shall come and sing in the high place of Zion*; on the top of that holy mountain they shall sing to the praise and glory of God. We read that they did



so when the foundation of the temple was laid there; they *sang together, praising and giving thanks to the Lord*; Ezra iii. 11. They *shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord*; that is, they shall flock in great numbers and with great forwardness and cheerfulness, as streams of water, *to the goodness of the Lord*, to the temple where he causes his goodness to pass before his people. They shall come together in solemn assemblies, to *praise him for his goodness*, and to pray for the fruits of it and the continuance of it; they shall come to bless him for his goodness, in giving them *wheat, and wine, and oil, and the young of the flock and of the herd*, which, now that they have obtained their freedom, they have an uncontested property in and the quiet and peaceable enjoyment of, and which therefore they honour God with the first-fruits of and out of which they bring offerings to his altar. Note, It is comfortable to observe the goodness of the Lord in the gifts of common providence, and even in them to taste covenant-love. Having plenty (plenty out of want and scarcity) they shall greatly rejoice, *their soul shall be as a watered garden*, flourishing and fruitful (Isa. lviii. 11), pleasant and fragrant, and abounding in all good things. Note, Our souls are never valuable as gardens but when they are watered with the dews of God's Spirit and grace. It is a precious promise which follows, and which will not have its full accomplishment any where on this side the height of the heavenly Zion, that *they shall not sorrow any more at all*; for it is only in that new Jerusalem that *all tears shall be wiped away*, Rev. xxi. 4. However, so far it was fulfilled to the returned captives that they had not any more those causes for sorrow which they had formerly had; and therefore (v. 13) *young men and old shall rejoice together*; so grave shall the young men be in their joys as to keep company with the old men, and so transported shall the old men be as to associate with the young. *Salva res est, saltat senex*—*The state prospers, and the aged dance*. God will turn their mourning into joy, their fasts into solemn feasts, Zech. viii. 19. It was in the return out of Babylon that those who *sowed in tears* were made to *reap in joy*, Ps. cxxvi. 5, 6. Those are comforted indeed whom God comforts, and may forget their troubles when he *makes them to rejoice from their sorrow*, not only rejoice after it, but rejoice from it; their joy shall borrow lustre from their sorrow, which shall serve as a foil to it; and the more they think of their troubles the more shall they rejoice in their deliverance. 4. That both the ministers and those they minister to shall have abundant satisfaction in what God gives them (v. 14): *I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness*; there shall be such a plenty of sacrifices brought to the altar that those who *live upon the altar* shall live very comfortably,

they and their families shall be *satiated with fatness*, they shall have enough, and that of the best; *and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness*, and shall think there is enough in that to make them happy; and so there is. God's people have an abundant satisfaction in God's goodness, though they have but little of this world. Let them be satisfied of God's lovingkindness, and they will be satisfied with it and desire no more to make them happy. All this is applicable to the spiritual blessings which the redeemed of the Lord enjoy by Jesus Christ, infinitely more valuable than corn, and wine, and oil, and the satisfaction of soul which they have in the enjoyment of them. 5. That those particularly who had been in sorrow for the loss of their children who were carried into captivity should have that sorrow turned into joy upon their return, v. 15—17. Here we have, (1.) The sad lamentation which the mothers made for the loss of their children (v. 15): *In Ramah was there a voice heard*, at the time when the general captivity was, nothing but *lamentation, and bitter weeping*, more there than in other places, because there Nebuzaradan had the general rendezvous of his captives, as appears, ch. xl. 1, where we find him sending Jeremiah back from Ramah. *Rachel* is here said to *weep for her children*. The sepulchre of Rachel was between Ramah and Bethlehem. Benjamin, one of the two tribes, and Ephraim, head of the ten tribes, were both descendants from Rachel. She had but two sons, the elder of whom was one for whom his father grieved and *refused to be comforted* (Gen. xxxvii. 35); the other she herself called *Ben-oni—the son of my sorrow*. Now the inhabitants of Ramah did in like manner *grieve for their sons and their daughters* that were carried away (as 1 Sam. xxx. 6), and such a voice of lamentation was there as, to speak poetically, might even have raised Rachel out of her grave to mourn with them. The tender parents even *refused to be comforted for their children, because they were not*, were not with them, but were in the hands of their enemies; they were never likely to see them any more. This is applied by the evangelists to the great mourning that was at Bethlehem for the murder of the infants there by Herod (Matt. ii. 17—18), and this scripture is said to be then fulfilled. They wept for them, *and would not be comforted*, supposing the case would not admit any ground of comfort, *because they were not*. Note, Sorrow for the loss of children cannot but be great sorrow, especially if we so far mistake as to think *they are not*. (2.) Seasonable comfort administered to them in reference hereunto, v. 16, 17. They are advised to moderate that sorrow, and to set bounds to it: *Refrain thy voice from weeping and thy eyes from tears*. We are not forbidden to mourn in such a case; allowances are made for natural affection. But we must

not suffer our sorrow to run into an extreme, to hinder our joy in God, or take us off from our duty to him. Though we mourn, we must not murmur, nor must we resolve, as Jacob did, to go to the grave mourning. In order to repress inordinate grief, we must consider that *there is hope in our end*, hope that there will be an end (the trouble will not last always), that it will be a happy end—the end will be peace. Note, It ought to support us under our troubles that we have reason to hope they will end well. *The righteous has hope in his death*; that will be the blessed period of his griefs and the blessed passage to his joys. "*There is hope for thy posterity*" (so some read it); though thou mayest not live to see these glorious days thyself, there is hope that thy posterity shall. Though one generation falls in the wilderness, the next shall enter Canaan. Two things thou mayest comfort thyself with the hope of:—[1.] "*The reward of thy work:—Thy suffering work shall be rewarded.*" The comforts of the deliverance shall be sufficient to balance all the grievances of thy captivity." God makes his people *glad according to the days wherein he has afflicted them*, and so there is a proportion between the joys and the sorrows, as between the reward and the work. *The glory to be revealed*, which the saints hope for in their end, will abundantly countervail *the sufferings of this present time*, Rom. viii. 18. [2.] "*The restoration of thy children: They shall come again from the land of the enemy (v. 16); they shall come again to their own border,*" v. 17. *There is hope* that children at a distance may be brought home. Jacob had a comfortable meeting with Joseph after he had despaired of ever seeing him. There is hope concerning children removed by death that they shall *return to their own border*, to the happy lot assigned them in the resurrection, a lot in the heavenly Canaan, that border of his sanctuary. We shall see reason to repress our grief for the death of our children that are taken into covenant with God when we consider the hopes we have of their resurrection to eternal life. They are not lost, but gone before.

18 I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself *thus*; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou *art* the LORD my God. 19 Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon *my* thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth. 20 *Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child?* for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still:

therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him; saith the LORD. 21 Set thee up way-marks, make thee high heaps: set thine heart toward the highway, *even* the way *which* thou wentest: turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities. 22 How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter? for the LORD hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man. 23 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; As yet they shall use this speech in the land of Judah and in the cities thereof, when I shall bring again their captivity; the LORD bless thee, O habitation of justice, and mountain of holiness. 24 And there shall dwell in Judah itself, and in all the cities thereof together, husbandmen, and they *that* go forth with flocks. 25 For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul. 26 Upon this I awaked, and beheld; and my sleep was sweet unto me.

We have here,

I. Ephraim's repentance, and return to God. Not only Judah, but Ephraim, the ten tribes, shall be restored, and therefore shall thus be prepared and qualified for it, Hos. xiv. 8. *Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?* Ephraim, the people, is here spoken of as a single person to denote their unanimity; they shall be as one man in their repentance and shall glorify God in it with one mind and one mouth, one and all. It is likewise thus expressed that it might be the better accommodated to particular penitents, for whose direction and encouragement this passage is intended. Ephraim is here brought in weeping for sin, perhaps because Ephraim, the person from whom that tribe had its denomination, was a man of a tender spirit, *mourned for his children many days* (1 Chron. vii. 21, 22), and sorrow for sin is compared to that for an only son. This penitent is here brought in, 1. Bemoaning himself and the miseries of his present case. True penitents do thus bemoan themselves. 2. Accusing himself, laying a load upon himself as a sinner, a great sinner. He charges upon himself, in the first place, that sin which his conscience told him that he was more especially guilty of at this time, and that was impatience under correction: "*Thou hast chastised me; I have been under the rod, and I needed it, I deserved it; I was justly chastised, chastised as a bullock*, who would never have felt the



goad if he had not first rebelled against the yoke." True penitents look upon their afflictions as fatherly chastisements: "*Thou hast chastised me and I was chastised*; that is, it was well that I was chastised, otherwise I should have been undone; it did me good, or at least was intended to do me good; and yet I have been impatient under it." Or it may intimate his want of feeling under the affliction: "*Thou hast chastised me and I was chastised*, that was all; I was not awakened by it and quickened by it; I looked no further than the chastisement. *I have been under the chastisement as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke*, unruly and unmanageable, kicking against the pricks, *like a wild bull in a net*," Isa. li. 20. This is the sin he finds himself guilty of now; but (v. 19) he reflects upon his former sins and looks as far back as the days of his youth. The discovery of one sin should put us upon searching out more; now he remembers *the reproach of his youth*. Ephraim, as a people, reflect upon the misconduct of their ancestors when they were first formed into a people. It is applicable to particular persons. Note, The sin of our youth was the reproach of our youth, and we ought often to remember it against ourselves and to bear it in a penitential sorrow and shame. 3. He is here brought in angry at himself, having a holy indignation at himself for his sin and folly: *He smote upon his thigh*, as the publican upon his breast. He was even amazed at himself, and at his own stupidity and frowardness: *He was ashamed, yea even confounded*, could not with any confidence look up to God, nor with any comfort reflect upon himself. 4. He is here recommending himself to the mercy and grace of God. He finds he is bent to backslide from God, and cannot by any power of his own keep himself close with God, much less, when he has revolted, bring himself back to God, and therefore he prays, *Turn thou me and I shall be turned*, which implies that unless God do turn him by his grace he shall never be turned, but wander endlessly, that therefore he is very desirous of converting grace, has a dependence upon it, and doubts not but that that grace will be sufficient for him, to help him over all the difficulties that were in the way of his return to God. See ch. xvii. 14, *Heal me and I shall be healed*. God works with power, can make the unwilling willing; if he undertake the conversion of a soul, it will be converted. 5. He is here pleasing himself with the experience he had of the blessed effect of divine grace: *Surely after that I was turned I repented*. Note, All the pious workings of our heart towards God are the fruit and consequence of the powerful working of his grace in us. And observe, He was *turned*, he was *instructed*, his will was bowed to the will of God, by the right informing of his judgment concerning the truths of God. Note, The way God takes of converting souls

to himself is by opening the eyes of their understandings, and all good follows thereupon: *After that I was instructed I yielded, I smote upon my thigh*. When sinners come to a right knowledge they will come to a right way. Ephraim was chastised, and that did not produce the desired effect, it went no further: *I was chastised*, and that was all. But, when the instructions of God's Spirit accompanied the corrections of his providence, then the work was done, then he *smote upon his thigh*, was so humbled for sin as to have no more to do with it.

II. God's compassion on Ephraim and the kind reception he finds with God, v. 20. 1. God owns him for a child, though he has been an undutiful child and a prodigal: *Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child?* Thus when Ephraim bemoans himself God bemoans him, as *one whom his mother comforts*, though she had chidden him, Isa. lxvi. 13. *Is this Ephraim my dear son? Is this that pleasant child?* Is it he that is thus sad in spirit and that complains so bitterly? So it is like that of Saul (1 Sam. xxvi. 17), *Is this thy voice, my son David?* Or, as it is sometimes supplied, *Is not Ephraim my dear son? Is he not a pleasant child?* Yes, now he is, now he repents and returns. Note, Those that have been undutiful backsliding children, if they sincerely return and repent, however they have been under the chastisement of the rod, shall be accepted of God as dear and pleasant children. Ephraim had afflicted himself, but God thus heals him—had abased himself, but God thus honours him; as the returning prodigal who thought himself no more worthy to be called a son, yet, by his father, had the best robe put upon him and a ring on his hand. 2. He relents towards him, and speaks of him with a great deal of tender compassion: *Since I spoke against him*, by the threatenings of the word and the rebukes of providence, *I do earnestly remember him still*, my thoughts towards him are thoughts of peace. Note, When God afflicts his people, yet he does not forget them; when he casts them out of their land, yet he does not cast them out of sight, nor out of mind. Even then when God is speaking against us, yet he is acting for us, and designing our good in all; and this is our comfort in our affliction, that *the Lord thinks upon us*, though we have forgotten him. *I remember him still*, and therefore *my bowels are troubled for him*, as Joseph's yearned towards his brethren, even when he spoke roughly to them. When Israel's afflictions extorted a penitent confession and submission it is said that his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel (Judg. x. 16), for he always afflicts with the greatest tenderness. It was God's compassion that mitigated Ephraim's punishment: *My heart is turned within me* (Hos. xi. 8, 9); and now the same compassion accepted Ephraim's repentance. Ephraim had pleaded (c. 18), *Thou art the*

*Lord my God*, therefore to thee will I return, therefore on thy mercy and grace I will depend; and God shows that it was a valid plea and prevailing, for he makes it appear both that he is God and not man and that he is *his* God. 3. He resolves to do him good: *I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord*. Note, God has mercy in store, rich mercy, sure mercy, suitable mercy, for all that in sincerity seek him and submit to him; and the more we are afflicted for sin the better prepared we are for the comforts of that mercy.

III. Gracious excitements and encouragements given to the people of God in Babylon to prepare for their return to their own land. Let them not tremble and lose their spirits; let them not trifle and lose their time; but with a firm resolution and a close application address themselves to their journey, *v. 21, 22*. 1. They must think of nothing but of coming back to their own country, out of which they had been driven: "*Turn again, O virgin of Israel! a virgin to be again espoused to thy God; turn again to these thy cities*; though they are laid waste and in ruins, they are *thy cities*, which thy God gave thee, and therefore *turn again* to them." They must be content in Babylon no longer than till they had liberty to return to Zion. 2. They must return the same way that they went, that the remembrance of the sorrows which attended them, or which their fathers had told them of, in such and such places upon the road, the sight of which would, by a local memory, put them in mind of them, might make them the more thankful for their deliverance. Those that have departed from God into the bondage of sin must return by the way in which they went astray, to the duties they neglected, must *do their first works*. 3. They must engage themselves and all that is within them in this affair: *Set thy heart towards the highway*; bring thy mind to it; consider thy duty, thy interest, and go about it with a good-will. Note, The way from Babylon to Zion, from the bondage of sin to the glorious liberty of God's children, is a highway; it is right, it is plain, it is safe, it is well-tracked (*Isa. xxxv. 8*); yet none are likely to walk in it, unless they *set their hearts towards it*. 4. They must furnish themselves with all needful accommodations for the journey: *Set thee up way-marks, and make thee high heaps or pillars*; send before to have such set up in all places where there is any danger of missing the road. Let those that go first, and are best acquainted with the way, set up such directions for those that follow. 5. They must compose themselves for their journey: *How long wilt thou go about, O backsliding daughter?* Let not their minds fluctuate, or be uncertain about it, but resolve upon it: let them not distract themselves with care and fear; let them not seek about for creatures for assistance, nor hurry hither

and thither in courting them, which had often been an instance of their backsliding from God; but let them cast themselves upon God, and then let their minds be fixed. 6. They are encouraged to do this by an assurance God gives them that he would *create a new thing* (strange and surprising) *in the earth* (in that land), *a woman shall compass a man*. The church of God, that is weak and feeble as a woman, altogether unapt for military employments and of a timorous spirit (*Isa. liv. 6*), shall surround, besiege, and prevail against a mighty man. The church is compared to a woman, *Rev. xii. 1*. And, whereas we find *armies compassing the camp of the saints* (*Rev. xx. 9*), now the camp of the saints shall compass them. Many good interpreters understand this *new thing* created in that land to be the incarnation of Christ, which God an eye to in bringing them back to that land, and which had sometimes been given them for a sign, *Isa. vii. 14*; *ix. 6*. *A woman*, the virgin Mary, enclosed in her womb *the Mighty One*; for so *Geber*, the word here used, signifies; and God is called *Gibbor, the Mighty God* (*ch. xxxii. 18*), as also is Christ in *Isa. ix. 6*, where his incarnation is spoken of, and it is supposed to be here. He is *El-Gibbor, the mighty God*. Let this assure them that God would not cast off this people, for that blessing was to be among them, *Isa. lxxv. 8*.

IV. A comfortable prospect given them of a happy settlement in their own land again. 1. They shall have an interest in the esteem and good-will of all their neighbours, who will give them a good word and put up a good prayer for them (*v. 23*): *As yet, or rather yet again* (though Judah and Jerusalem have long been an astonishment and a hissing), *this speech shall be used*, as it was formerly, *concerning the land of Judah and the cities thereof, The Lord bless you, O habitation of justice and mountain of holiness!* This intimates that they shall return much reformed and every way better; and this reformation shall be so conspicuous that all about them shall take notice of it. The *cities*, that used to be nests of pirates, shall be *habitations of justice*; the *mountain of Israel* (so the whole land is called, *Ps. lxxviii. 54*), and especially Mount Zion, shall be a *mountain of holiness*. Observe, Justice towards men, and holiness towards God, must go together. Godliness and honesty are what God has joined, and let no man think to put them asunder, nor to make one to atone for the want of the other. It is well with a people when they come out of trouble thus refined, and it is a sure presage of further happiness. And we may with great comfort pray for the blessing of God upon those houses that are *habitations of justice*, those cities and countries that are *mountains of holiness*. There the Lord will undoubtedly *command the blessing*. 2. There shall be great plenty of all good things among them



(v. 24, 25): *There shalt dwell in Judah itself*, even in it, though it has now long lain waste, both husbandmen and shepherds, the two ancient and honourable employments of Cain and Abel, Gen. iv. 2. It is comfortable dwelling in a *habitation of justice* and a *mountain of holiness*. "And the husbandmen and shepherds shall eat of the fruit of their labours; for I have *satiated the weary and sorrowful soul*;" that is, those that came weary from their journey, and have been long sorrowful in their captivity, shall now enjoy great plenty. This is applicable to the spiritual blessings God has in store for all true penitents, for all that are just and holy; they shall be abundantly satisfied with divine graces and comforts. In the love and favour of God the weary soul shall find rest and the sorrowful soul joy.

V. The prophet tells us what pleasure the discovery of this brought to his mind, v. 26. The foresights God had given him sometimes of the calamities of Judah and Jerusalem were exceedingly painful to him (as ch. iv. 19), but these views were pleasing ones, though at a distance. "*Upon this I awaked*, overcome with joy, which burst the fetters of sleep; and I reflected upon my dream, and it was such as had made *my sleep sweet to me*; I was refreshed, as men are with quiet sleep." Those may sleep sweetly that lie down and rise up in the favour of God and in communion with him. Nor is any prospect in this world more pleasing to good men, and good ministers, than that of the flourishing state of the church of God. What can we see with more satisfaction than *the good of Jerusalem, all the days of our life, and peace upon Israel?*

27 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man, and with the seed of beast. 28 And it shall come to pass, *that* like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will I watch over them, to build, and to plant, saith the LORD. 29 In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. 30 But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge. 31 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: 32 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them

by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them, saith the LORD: 33 But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

The prophet, having found his sleep sweet, made so by the revelations of divine grace, sets himself to sleep again, in hopes of further discoveries, and is not disappointed; for it is here further promised,

I. That the people of God shall become both numerous and prosperous. Israel and Judah shall be replenished both with men and cattle, as if they were sown with the seed of both, v. 27. They shall increase and multiply like a field sown with corn; and this is the product of God's blessing (v. 23), for whom God blessed, to them he said, *Be fruitful*. This should be a type of the wonderful increase of the gospel-church. God will build them, and plant them, v. 28. He *will watch over them* to do them good; no opportunity shall be lost that may further their prosperity. Every thing for a long time had turned so much against them, and all occurrences did so transpire to ruin them, that it seemed as if God had *watched over them to pluck up and to throw down*; but now every thing that falls out shall happily fall in to strengthen and advance their interests. God will be as ready to comfort those that repent of their sins, and are humbled for them, as he is to punish those that continue in love with their sins, and are hardened in them.

II. That they shall be reckoned with no further for the sins of their fathers (v. 29, 30): *They shall say no more* (they shall have no more occasion to say) *that God visits the iniquity of the parents upon the children*, which God had done in the captivity, for the sins of their ancestors came into the account against them, particularly those of Manasseh: this they had complained of as a hardship. Other scriptures justify God in this method of proceeding, and our Saviour tells the wicked Jews in his days that they should smart for their fathers' sins, because they persisted in them, Matt. xxiii. 35, 36 But it is here promised that this severe dis-

pensation with them should now be brought to an end, that God would proceed no further in his controversy with them for their fathers' sins, but remember for them his covenant with their fathers and do them good according to that covenant: *They shall no more complain, as they have done, that the fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge* (which speaks something of an absurdity, and is an invidious reflection upon God's proceedings), but *every one shall die for his own iniquity still*; though God will cease to punish them in their national capacity, yet he will still reckon with particular persons that provoke him. Note, Public salvations will give no impunity, no security, to private sinners: still every man that *eats the sour grapes* shall have his *teeth set on edge*. Note, Those that eat forbidden fruit, how tempting soever it looks, will find it a *sour grape*, and it will *set their teeth on edge*; sooner or later they will feel from it and reflect upon it with bitterness. There is as direct a tendency in sin to make a man uneasy as there is in sour grapes to set the teeth on edge.

III. That God will renew his covenant with them, so that all these blessings they shall have, not by providence only, but by promise, and thereby they shall be both sweetened and secured. But this covenant refers to gospel times, the latter days that *shall come*; for of gospel grace the apostle understands it (Heb. viii. 8, 9, &c.), where this whole passage is quoted as a summary of the covenant of grace made with believers in Jesus Christ. Observe, 1. Who the persons are with whom this covenant is made—*with the house of Israel and Judah*, with the gospel church, *the Israel of God* on which *peace shall be* (Gal. vi. 16), with the spiritual seed of believing Abraham and praying Jacob. Judah and Israel had been two separate kingdoms, but were united after their return, in the joint favours God bestowed upon them; so Jews and Gentiles were in the gospel church and covenant. 2. What is the nature of this covenant in general: it is a *new covenant* and *not according to the covenant made with them when they came out of Egypt*; not as if that made with them at Mount Sinai were a covenant of nature and innocence, such as was made with Adam in the day he was created; no, that was, for substance, a covenant of grace, but it was a dark dispensation of that covenant in comparison with this in gospel times. Sinners were saved by that covenant upon their repentance, and faith in a Messiah to come, whose blood, confirming that covenant, was typified by that of the legal sacrifices, Exod. xxiv. 7, 8. Yet this may upon many accounts be called new, in comparison with that; the ordinances and promises are more spiritual and heavenly, and the discoveries much more clear. That covenant God made with them when he *took them by*

*the hand*, as if they had been blind, or lame, or weak, *to lead them out of the land of Egypt, which covenant they broke*. Observe, It was God that made this covenant, but it was the people that broke it; for our salvation is of God, but our sin and ruin are of ourselves. It was an aggravation of their breach of it that God was a *husband to them*, that he had espoused them to himself; it was a marriage-covenant that was between him and them, which they broke by idolatry, that spiritual adultery. It is a great aggravation of our treacherous departures from God that he has been a husband to us, a loving, tender, careful husband, faithful to us, and yet we false to him. 3. What are the particular articles of his covenant. They all contain spiritual blessings; not, "I will give them the land of Canaan and a numerous issue," but, "I will give them pardon, and peace, and grace, good heads and good hearts." He promises, (1.) That he will incline them to their duty: *I will put my law in their inward part and write it in their heart*; not, I will give them a new law (as Mr. Gataker well observes), for Christ *came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it*; but the law shall be written in their hearts by the finger of the Spirit as formerly it was written in the tables of stone. God writes his law in the hearts of all believers, makes it ready and familiar to them, at hand when they have occasion to use it, as that which is *written in the heart*, Prov. iii. 3. He makes them in care to observe it, for that which we are solicitous about is said to lie near our hearts. He works in them a disposition to obedience, a conformity of thought and affection to the rules of the divine law, as that of the copy to the original. This is here promised, and ought to be prayed for, that our duty may be done conscientiously and with delight. (2.) That he will take them into relation to himself: *I will be their God*, a God all-sufficient to them, *and they shall be my people*, a loyal obedient people to me. God's being to us a God is the summary of all happiness; heaven itself is no more, Heb. xi. 16; Rev. xxi. 3. Our being to him a people may be taken either as the condition on our part (those and those only shall have God to be to them a God that are truly willing to engage themselves to be to him a people) or as a further branch of the promise that God will by his grace make us his people, a *willing people, in the day of his power*; and, whoever are his people, it is his grace that makes them so. (3.) That there shall be an abundance of the knowledge of God among all sorts of people, and this will have an influence upon all good: for those that rightly know God's name will seek him, and serve him, and put their trust in him (v. 34): *All shall know me*; all shall be welcome to the knowledge of God and shall have the means of that knowledge; *his ways shall be known upon earth*, whereas, for many ages, in Judah only was



*God known.* Many more shall know God than did in the Old-Testament times, which among the Gentiles were times of ignorance, the true God being to them an unknown God. The things of God shall in gospel times be made more plain and intelligible, and level to the capacities of the meanest, than they were while Moses had a *veil upon his face*. There shall be such a general knowledge of God that there shall not be so much need as had formerly been of teaching. Some take it as a hyperbolical expression (and the dulness of the Jews needed such expressions to awaken them), designed only to show that the knowledge of God in gospel times should vastly exceed that knowledge of him which they had under the law. Or perhaps it intimates that in gospel times there shall be such great plenty of public preaching, stately and constantly, by men authorized and appointed to *preach the word in season and out of season*, much beyond what was under the law, that there shall be less need than there was then of fraternal teaching, by a neighbour and a brother. The priests preached but now and then, and in the temple, and to a few in comparison; but now all shall or may know God by frequenting the assemblies of Christians, wherein, through all parts of the church, the good knowledge of God shall be taught. Some give this sense of it (Mr. Gataker mentions it), That many shall have such clearness of understanding in the things of God that they may seem rather to have been taught by some immediate irradiation than by any means of instruction. In short, the things of God shall by the gospel of Christ be brought to a clearer light than ever (2 Tim. i. 10), and the people of God shall by the grace of Christ be brought to a clearer sight of those things than ever, Eph. i. 17, 18. (4.) That, in order to all these blessings, sin shall be pardoned. This is made the reason of all the rest: *For I will forgive their iniquity*, will not impute that to them, nor deal with them according to the desert of that, *will forgive and forget: I will remember their sin no more*. It is sin that keeps good things from us, that stops the current of God's favours; let sin be taken away by pardoning mercy, and the obstruction is removed, and divine grace runs down like a river, like a mighty stream

35 Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name: 36 If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. 37 Thus

saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD. 38 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that the city shall be built to the LORD from the tower of Hananeel unto the gate of the corner. 39 And the measuring-line shall yet go forth over against it upon the hill Gareb, and shall compass about to Goath. 40 And the whole valley of the dead bodies, and of the ashes, and all the fields unto the brook of Kidron, unto the corner of the horse-gate toward the east, *shall be holy* unto the LORD; it shall not be plucked up, nor thrown down any more for ever.

Glorious things have been spoken in the foregoing verses concerning the gospel church, which that epocha of the Jewish church that was to commence at the return from captivity would at length terminate in, and which all those promises were to have their full accomplishment in. But may we depend upon these promises? Yes, we have here a ratification of them, and the utmost assurance imaginable given of the perpetuity of the blessings contained in them. The great thing here secured to us is that while the world stands God will have a church in it, which, though sometimes it may be brought very low, shall yet be raised again, and its interests re-established; it is *built upon a rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*. Now here are two things offered for the confirmation of our faith in this matter—the building of the world and the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

I. The building of the world, and the firmness and lastingness of that building, are evidences of the power and faithfulness of that God who has undertaken the establishment of his church. *He that built all things at first is God* (Heb. iii. 4), and the same is he that makes all things now. The constancy of the glories of the kingdom of nature may encourage us to depend upon the divine promise for the continuance of the glories of the kingdom of grace, for *this is as the waters of Noah*, Isa. liv. 9. Let us observe here,

1. The glories of the kingdom of nature, and infer thence how happy those are that have this God, the God of nature, to be their God for ever and ever. Take notice, (1.) Of the steady and regular motion of the heavenly bodies, which God is the first mover and supreme director of: *He gives the sun for a light by day* (v. 35), not only made it at first to be so, but still gives it to be so; for the light and heat, and all the

influences of the sun, continually depend upon its great Creator. He gives *the ordinances of the moon and stars for a light by night*; their motions are called *ordinances* both because they are regular and by rule and because they are determined and under rule. See Job xxxviii. 31—33. (2.) Take notice of the government of the sea, and the check that is given to its proud billows: *The Lord of hosts divides the sea, or (as some read it) settles the sea, when the waves thereof roar (divide et impera—divide and rule)*; when it is most tossed God keeps it within compass (Jer. v. 22), and soon quiets it and makes it calm again. The power of God is to be magnified by us, not only in maintaining the regular motions of the heavens, but in controlling the irregular motions of the seas. (3.) Take notice of the vastness of the heavens and the unmeasurable extent of the firmament; he must needs be a great God who manages such a great world as this is; *the heavens above cannot be measured (v. 37)*, and yet God fills them. (4.) Take notice of the mysteriousness even of that part of the creation in which our lot is cast and which we are most conversant with. *The foundations of the earth cannot be searched out beneath, for the Creator hangs the earth upon nothing (Job xxvi. 7), and we know not how the foundations thereof are fastened, Job xxxviii. 6.* (5.) Take notice of the immovable steadfastness of all these (v. 36): *These ordinances cannot depart from before God*; he has all the hosts of heaven and earth continually under his eye and all the motions of both; he has established them, and they abide, *abide according to his ordinance, for all are his servants*, Ps. cxix. 90, 91. The heavens are often clouded, and the sun and moon often eclipsed, the earth may quake and the sea be tossed, but they all keep their place, are moved, but not removed. Herein we must acknowledge the power, goodness, and faithfulness of the Creator.

2. The securities of the kingdom of grace inferred hence: we may be confident of this very thing that *the seed of Israel shall not cease from being a nation*, for the spiritual Israel, the gospel church, shall be *a holy nation, a peculiar people*, 1 Pet. ii. 9. When Israel according to the flesh is no longer a nation *the children of the promise are counted for the seed* (Rom. ix. 8) and *God will not cast off all the seed of Israel*, no, not for all that they have done, though they have done very wickedly, v. 37. He justly might cast them off, but he will not. Though he cast them out from their land, and cast them down for a time, yet he will not cast them off. Some of them he casts off, but not all; to this the apostle seems to refer (Rom. xi. 1), *Hath God cast away his people?* God forbid that we should think so! For (v. 5) *at this time there is a remnant, enough to save the credit of the promise that God will not cast off all the seed of Israel* though

many among them throw away themselves by unbelief. Now we may be assisted in the belief of this by considering, (1.) That the God that has undertaken the preservation of the church is a God of almighty power, *who upholds all things by his almighty word. Our help stands in his name who made heaven and earth*, and therefore can do any thing. (2.) That God would not take all this care of the world but that he designs to have some glory to himself out of it; and how shall he have it but by securing to himself a church in it, a people that *shall be to him for a name and a praise*? (3.) That if the order of the creation therefore continues firm because it was well-fixed at first, and is not altered because it needs no alteration, the method of grace shall for the same reason continue invariable, as it was at first well settled. (4.) That he who has promised to preserve a church for himself has approved himself faithful to the word which he has spoken concerning the stability of the world. He that is true to his covenant with Noah and his sons, because he established it for an *everlasting covenant* (Gen. ix. 9, 16), will not, we may be sure, be false to his covenant with Abraham and his seed, his spiritual seed, for that also is an *everlasting covenant*. Even that which they have done amiss, though they have done much, shall not prevail to defeat the gracious intentions of the covenant. See Ps. lxxxix. 30, &c.

II. The rebuilding of Jerusalem which was now in ruins, and the enlargement and establishment of that, shall be an earnest of these great things that God will do for the gospel church, the *heavenly Jerusalem*, v. 38—40. *The days will come*, though they may be long in coming, when, 1. Jerusalem shall be entirely built again, as large as ever it was; the dimensions are here exactly described by the places through which the circumference passed, and no doubt the wall which Nehemiah built, and which, the more punctually to fulfil the prophecy, began about the *tower of Hananeel*, here mentioned (Neh. iii. 1), enclosed as much ground as is here intended, though we cannot certainly determine the places here called *the gate of the corner, the hill Gareb, &c.* 2. When built it shall be consecrated to God and to his service. *It shall be built to the Lord (v. 38)*, and even the suburbs and fields adjacent *shall be holy unto the Lord*. It shall not be polluted with idols as formerly, but God shall be praised and honoured there; the whole city shall be as it were one temple, one holy place, as the new Jerusalem is, which therefore has no temple, because it is all temple. 3. Being thus built by virtue of the promise of God, and then devoted to the praise of God, *it shall not be plucked up, nor thrown down, any more for ever*; that is, it shall continue very long, the time of the new city from the return to its last destruction being fully as long as that of the old from



David to the captivity. But this promise was to have its full accomplishment in the gospel church, which, as it is the spiritual Israel, and therefore God will not cast it off, so it is the holy city, and therefore all the powers of men *shall not pluck it up, nor throw it down*. It may lie waste for a time, as Jerusalem did, but shall recover itself, shall weather the storm and gain its point, *and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*.

## CHAP. XXXII.

In this chapter we have, I. Jeremiah imprisoned for foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of king Zedekiah, ver. 1—5. II. We have him buying land, by divine appointment, as an assurance that in due time a happy end should be put to the present troubles, ver. 6—15. III. We have his prayer, which he offered up to God upon that occasion, ver. 16—25. IV. We have a message which God thereupon entrusted him to deliver to the people. 1. He must foretell the utter destruction of Judah and Jerusalem for their sins, ver. 25—35. But, 2. At the same time he must assure them that, though the destruction was total, it should not be final, but that at length their posterity should recover the peaceable possession of their own land, ver. 36—44. The predictions of this chapter, both threatnings and promises, are much the same with what we have already met with again and again, but here are some circumstances that are very particular and remarkable.

**T**HE word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, which *was* the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. 2 For then the king of Babylon's army besieged Jerusalem: and Jeremiah the prophet was shut up in the court of the prison, which *was* in the king of Judah's house. 3 For Zedekiah king of Judah had shut him up, saying, Wherefore dost thou prophesy, and say, Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it; 4 And Zedekiah king of Judah shall not escape out of the hand of the Chaldeans, but shall surely be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him mouth to mouth, and his eyes shall behold his eyes; 5 And he shall lead Zedekiah to Babylon, and there shall he be until I visit him, saith the LORD: though ye fight with the Chaldeans, ye shall not prosper. 6 And Jeremiah said, The word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 7 Behold, Hanameel the son of Shallum thine uncle shall come unto thee, saying, Buy thee my field that *is* in Anathoth: for the right of redemption *is* thine to buy *it*. 8 So Hanameel mine uncle's son came to me in the court of the prison according to the word of the LORD, and said unto me, Buy my field, I pray thee, that *is* in Anathoth, which *is* in

the country of Benjamin: for the right of inheritance *is* thine, and the redemption *is* thine; buy *it* for thyself. Then I knew that this *was* the word of the LORD. 9 And I bought the field of Hanameel my uncle's son, that *was* in Anathoth, and weighed him the money, *even* seventeen shekels of silver. 10 And I subscribed the evidence, and sealed *it*, and took witnesses, and weighed *him* the money in the balances. 11 So I took the evidence of the purchase, *both* that which was sealed *according* to the law and custom, and that which was open: 12 And I gave the evidence of the purchase unto Baruch the son of Neriah, the son of Maaseiah, in the sight of Hanameel mine uncle's son, and in the presence of the witnesses that subscribed the book of the purchase, before all the Jews that sat in the court of the prison. 13 And I charged Baruch before them, saying, 14 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Take these evidences, this evidence of the purchase, both which is sealed, and this evidence which is open; and put them in an earthen vessel, that they may continue many days. 15 For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land.

It appears by the date of this chapter that we are now coming very nigh to that fatal year which completed the desolations of Judah and Jerusalem by the Chaldeans. God's judgments came gradually upon them, but, they not meeting him by repentance in the way of his judgments, he proceeded in his controversy till all was laid waste, which was in the eleventh year of Zedekiah; now what is here recorded happened in the tenth. The king of Babylon's army had now invested Jerusalem and was carrying on the siege with vigour, not doubting but in a little time to make themselves masters of it, while the besieged had taken up a desperate resolution not to surrender, but to hold out to the last extremity. Now,

I. Jeremiah prophesies that both the city and the court shall fall into the hands of the king of Babylon. He tells them expressly that the besiegers shall take the city as a prize, for God, whose city it was in a peculiar manner, will give it into their hands and put it out of his protection (c. 3),—that, though Zedekiah attempt to make his escape, he

shall be overtaken, and shall be delivered a prisoner into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, shall be brought into his presence, to his great confusion and terror, he having made himself so obnoxious by breaking his faith with him; he shall hear the king of Babylon pronounce his doom, and see with what fury and indignation he will look upon him (*His eyes shall behold his eyes*, v. 4).—that Zedekiah shall be carried to Babylon, and continue a miserable captive there, *until God visit him*, that is, till God put an end to his life by a natural death, as Nebuchadnezzar had long before put an end to his days by putting out his eyes. Note, Those that live in misery may be truly said to be visited in mercy when God by death takes them home to himself. And, *lastly*, he foretells that all their attempts to force the besiegers from their trenches shall be ineffectual: *Though you fight with the Chaldeans, you shall not prosper*; how should they, when God did not fight for them? v. 5. See *ch. xxxiv. 2, 3*.

II. For prophesying thus he is imprisoned, not in the common gaol, but in the more creditable prison that was within the verge of the palace, *in the king of Judah's house*, and there not closely confined, but in *custodia libera—in the court of the prison*, where he might have good company, good air, and good intelligence brought him, and would be sheltered from the abuses of the mob; but, however, it was a prison, and Zedekiah shut him up in it for prophesying as he did, v. 2, 3. So far was he from *humbling himself before Jeremiah*, as he ought to have done (2 Chron. xxxvi. 12), that he *hardened himself* against him. Though he had formerly so far owned him to be a prophet as to desire him to *enquire of the Lord for them* (*ch. xxi. 2*), yet now he chides him for prophesying (v. 3), and shuts him up in prison, perhaps not with design to punish him any further, but only to restrain him from prophesying any further, which was crime enough. Silencing God's prophets, though it is not so bad as mocking and killing them, is yet a great affront to the God of heaven. See how wretchedly the hearts of sinners are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Persecution was one of the sins for which God was now contending with them, and yet Zedekiah persists in it even now that he was in the depth of distress. No providences, no afflictions, will of themselves part between men and their sins, unless the grace of God work with them. Nay, some are made worse by those very judgments that should make them better.

III. Being in prison, he purchases from a near relation of his a piece of ground that lay in Anathoth, v. 6, 7, &c.

1. One would not have expected, (1.) That a prophet should concern himself so far in the business of this world; but why not? Though ministers must not entangle themselves, yet they may concern themselves in the affairs of

this life. (2.) That one who had neither wife nor children should buy land. We find (*ch. xvi. 2*) that he had no family of his own; yet he may purchase for his own use while he lives, and leave it to the children of his relations when he dies. (3.) One would little have thought that a prisoner should be a purchaser; how should he get money before hand to buy land with? It is probable that he lived frugally, and saved something out of what belonged to him as a priest, which is no blemish at all to his character; but we have no reason to think that the people were kind, or that his being beforehand was owing to their generosity. Nay, (4.) It was most strange of all that he should buy a *piece of land* when he himself knew that the whole land was now to be laid waste and fall into the hands of the Chaldeans, and then what good would this do him? But it was the will of God that he should buy it, and he submitted, though the money seemed to be thrown away. His kinsman came to offer it to him; it was not of his own seeking; he coveted not to lay house to house and field to field, but Providence brought it to him, and it was probably a good bargain; besides, the *right of redemption* belonged to him (v. 8), and if he refused he would not do the kinsman's part. It is true he might lawfully refuse, but, being a prophet, in a thing of this nature he must do that which would be for the honour of his profession. *It became him to fulfil all righteousness*. It was land that lay within the suburbs of a priests' city, and, if he should refuse it, there was danger lest, in these times of disorder, it might be sold to one of another tribe, which was contrary to the law, to prevent which it was convenient for him to buy it. It would likewise be a kindness to his kinsman, who probably was at this time in great want of money. Jeremiah had but a little, but what he had he was willing to lay out in such a manner as might tend most to the honour of God and the good of his friends and country, which he preferred before his own private interests.

2. Two things may be observed concerning this purchase:—

(1.) How fairly the bargain was made.

When Jeremiah knew by Hanameel's coming to him, as God had foretold he would, that *it was the word of the Lord*, that it was his mind that he should make this purchase, he made no more difficulty of it, but *bought the field*. And, [1.] He was very honest and exact in paying the money. He *weighed him the money*, did not press him to take it upon his report, though he was his near kinsman, but weighed it to him, current money. It was *seventeen shekels of silver*, amounting to about forty shillings of our money. The land was probably but a little field and of small yearly value, when the purchase was so low: besides, the *right of inheritance* was in Jeremiah, so that he



had only to buy out his kinsman's life, the reversion being his already. Some think this was only the earnest of a greater sum; but we shall not wonder at the smallness of the price if we consider what scarcity there was of money at this time and how little lands were counted upon. [2.] He was very prudent and discreet in preserving the writings. They were subscribed *before witnesses*. One copy was *sealed up*, the other was *open*. One was the original, the other the counterpart; or perhaps that which was *sealed up* was for his own private use, the other that was *open* was to be laid up in the public register of conveyances, for any person concerned to consult. Due care and caution in things of this nature might prevent a great deal of injustice and contention. The deeds of purchase were lodged in the hands of Baruch, before witnesses, and he was ordered to lay them up in an *earthen vessel* (an emblem of the nature of all the securities this world can pretend to give us, brittle things and soon broken), that they might *continue many days*, for the use of Jeremiah's heirs, after the return out of captivity; for they might then have the benefit of this purchase. Purchasing reversions may be a kindness to those that come after us, and a good man thus *lays up an inheritance for his children's children*.

(2.) What was the design of having this bargain made. It was to signify that though Jerusalem was now besieged, and the whole country was likely to be laid waste, yet the time should come when *houses, and fields, and vineyards should be again possessed in this land*, v. 15. As God appointed Jeremiah to confirm his predictions of the approaching destruction of Jerusalem by his own practice in living unmarried, so he now appointed him to confirm his predictions of the future restoration of Jerusalem by his own practice in purchasing this field. Note, It concerns ministers to make it to appear in their whole conversation that they do themselves believe that which they preach to others; and that they may do so, and impress it the more deeply upon their hearers, they must many a time deny themselves, as Jeremiah did in both these instances. God having promised that this land should again come into the possession of his people, Jeremiah will, on behalf of his heirs, put in for a share. Note, It is good to manage even our worldly affairs in faith, and to do common business with an eye to the providence and promise of God. Lucius Florus relates it as a great instance of the bravery of the Roman citizens that in the time of the second Punic war, when Hannibal besieged Rome and was very near making himself master of it, a field on which part of his army lay, being offered to sale at that time, was immediately purchased, in a firm belief that the Roman valour would raise the siege, *lib. ii. cap. 6*. And have not we much more reason to ven-

ture our all upon the word of God, and to embark in Zion's interests, which will undoubtedly be the prevailing interests at last? *Non si male nunc et olim sic erit—Though now we suffer, we shall not suffer always.*

16 Now when I had delivered the evidence of the purchase unto Baruch the son of Neriah, I prayed unto the Lord, saying, 17 Ah, Lord God! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee: 18 Thou showest lovingkindness unto thousands, and recompensest the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them: the Great, the Mighty God, the Lord of hosts, *is* his name, 19 Great in counsel, and mighty in work: for thine eyes *are* open upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings: 20 Which hast set signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, *even* unto this day, and in Israel, and among *other* men; and hast made thee a name, as at this day; 21 And hast brought forth thy people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs, and with wonders, and with a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with great terror; 22 And hast given them this land, which thou didst swear to their fathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey; 23 And they came in, and possessed it; but they obeyed not thy voice, neither walked in thy law; they have done nothing of all that thou commandedst them to do: therefore thou hast caused all this evil to come upon them: 24 Behold the mounts, they are come unto the city to take it; and the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans, that fight against it, because of the sword, and of the famine, and of the pestilence: and what thou hast spoken is come to pass; and, behold, thou seest *it*. 25 And thou hast said unto me, O Lord God, Buy thee the field for money, and take witnesses; for the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans.

We have here Jeremiah's prayer to God upon occasion of the discoveries God had

made to him of his purposes concerning this nation, to pull it down, and in process of time to build it up again, which puzzled the prophet himself, who, though he delivered his messages faithfully, yet, in reflecting upon them, was greatly at a loss within himself how to reconcile them; in that perplexity he poured out his soul before God in prayer, and so gave himself ease. That which disturbed him was not the bad bargain he seemed to have made for himself in purchasing a field that he was likely to have no good of, but the case of his people, for whom he was still a kind and faithful intercessor, and he was willing to hope that, if God had so much mercy in store for them hereafter as he had promised, he would not proceed with so much severity against them now as he had threatened. Before Jeremiah went to prayer he delivered the deeds that concerned his new purchase to Baruch, which may intimate to us that when we are going to worship God we should get our minds as clear as may be from the cares and incumbrances of this world. Jeremiah was in prison, in distress, in the dark about the meaning of God's providences, and then he prays. Note, Prayer is a salve for every sore. Whatever is a burden to us, we may by prayer cast it upon the Lord and then be easy.

In this prayer, or meditation,

I. Jeremiah adores God and his infinite perfections, and gives him the glory due to his name as the Creator, upholder, and benefactor, of the whole creation, thereby owning his irresistible power, that he can do what he will, and his incontestable sovereignty, that he may do what he will, v. 17—19. Note, When at any time we are perplexed about the particular methods and dispensations of Providence it is good for us to have recourse to our first principles, and to satisfy ourselves with the general doctrines of God's wisdom, power, and goodness. Let us consider, as Jeremiah does here, 1. That God is the fountain of all being, power, life, motion, and perfection: He made the heaven and the earth with his outstretched arm; and therefore who can control him? Who dares contend with him? 2. That with him nothing is impossible, no difficulty insuperable: *Nothing is too hard for thee*. When human skill and power are quite nonplussed, *with God are strength and wisdom* sufficient to master all the opposition. 3. That he is a God of boundless bottomless mercy; mercy is his darling attribute; it is his goodness that is his glory: "Thou not only art kind, but thou showest lovingkindness, not to a few, to here and there one, but to thousands, thousands of persons, thousands of generations." 4. That he is a God of impartial and inflexible justice. His reprieves are not pardons, but if in mercy he spares the parents, that they may be led to repentance, yet such a hatred

has he to sin, and such a displeasure against sinners, that he recompenses their iniquity into the bosom of their children, and yet does them no wrong; so hateful is the unrighteousness of man, and so jealous of its own honour is the righteousness of God. 5. That he is a God of universal dominion and command: He is the great God, for he is the mighty God, and might among men makes them great. He is the Lord of hosts, of all hosts, that is his name, and he answers to his name, for all the hosts of heaven and earth, of men and angels, are at his beck. 6. That he contrives every thing for the best, and effects every thing as he contrived it: He is great in counsel, so vast are the reaches and so deep are the designs of his wisdom; and he is mighty in doing, according to the counsel of his will. Now such a God as this is not to be quarrelled with. His service is to be constantly adhered to and all his disposals cheerfully acquiesced in.

II. He acknowledges the universal cognizance God takes of all the actions of the children of men and the unerring judgment he passes upon them (v. 19): *Thy eyes are open upon all the sons of men*, wherever they are, beholding the evil and the good, and upon all their ways, both the course they take and every step they take, not as an unconcerned spectator, but as an observing judge, to give every one according to his ways and according to his deserts, which are the fruit of his doings; for men shall find God as they are found of him.

III. He recounts the great things God had done for his people Israel formerly. 1. He brought them out of Egypt, that house of bondage, with signs and wonders, which remain, if not in the marks of them, yet in the memorials of them, even unto this day; for it would never be forgotten, not only in Israel, who were reminded of it every year by the ordinance of the passover, but among other men: all the neighbouring nations spoke of it, as that which redounded exceedingly to the glory of the God of Israel, and made him a name as at this day. This is repeated (v. 21), that God brought them forth, not only with comforts and joys to them, but with glory to himself, with signs and wonders (witness the ten plagues), with a strong hand, too strong for the Egyptians themselves, and with a stretched-out arm, that reached Pharaoh, proud as he was, and with great terror to them and all about them. This seems to refer to Deut. iv. 34. 2. He brought them into Canaan, that good land, that land flowing with milk and honey. He swore to their fathers to give it them, and, because he would perform his oath, he did give it to the children (v. 22) and they came in and possessed it. Jeremiah mentions this both as an aggravation of their sin and disobedience and also as a plea with God to work deliverance for them. Note, It is good for us often to reflect upon



the great things that God did for his church formerly, especially in the first erecting of it, that work of wonder.

IV. He bewails the rebellions they had been guilty of against God, and the judgments God had brought upon them for these rebellions. It is a sad account he here gives of the ungrateful conduct of that people towards God. He had done every thing that he had promised to do (they had acknowledged it, 1 Kings viii. 56), but they had *done nothing of all that he commanded them to do* (v. 23); they made no conscience of any of *his laws*; they *walked not* in them, paid no respect to any of his calls by his prophets, for they *obeyed not his voice*. And therefore he owns that God was righteous in *causing all this evil to come upon them*. The city is besieged, is attacked by the sword without, is weakened and wasted by the *famine and pestilence* within, so that it is ready to fall into the hands of the Chaldeans that fight against it (v. 24); it is *given into their hands*, v. 25. Now, 1. He compares the present state of Jerusalem with the divine predictions, and finds that what God has spoken has come to pass. God had given them fair warning of it before; and, if they had regarded this, the ruin would have been prevented; but, if they will not do what God has commanded, they can expect no other than that he should do what he has threatened. 2. He commits the present state of Jerusalem to the divine consideration and compassion (v. 24): *Behold the mounds, or ramparts, or the engines which they make use of to batter the city and beat down the wall of it*. And again, *"Behold thou seest it, and takest cognizance of it. Is this the city that thou hast chosen to put thy name there? And shall it be thus abandoned?"* He neither complains of God for what he had done nor prescribes to God what he should do, but desires he would behold their case, and is pleased to think that he does behold it. Whatever trouble we are in, upon a personal or public account, we may comfort ourselves with this, that God sees it and sees how to remedy it.

V. He seems desirous to be let further into the meaning of the order God had now given him to purchase his kinsman's field (v. 25): *"Though the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and no man is likely to enjoy what he has, yet thou hast said unto me, Buy thou the field."* As soon as he understood that it was the mind of God he did it, and made no objections, was not disobedient to the heavenly vision; but, when he had done it, he desired better to understand why God had ordered him to do it, because the thing looked strange and unaccountable. Note, Though we are bound to follow God with an implicit obedience, yet we should endeavour that it may be more and more an intelligent obedience. We must never dispute God's statutes and judgments,

but we may and must enquire, *What mean these statutes and judgments?* Deut. vi. 20.

26 Then came the word of the LORD unto Jeremiah, saying, 27 Behold, I *am* the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me? 28 Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the Chaldeans, and into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, and he shall take it: 29 And the Chaldeans, that fight against this city, shall come and set fire on this city, and burn it with the houses, upon whose roofs they have offered incense unto Baal, and poured out drink offerings unto other gods, to provoke me to anger. 30 For the children of Israel and the children of Judah have only done evil before me from their youth: for the children of Israel have only provoked me to anger with the work of their hands, saith the LORD. 31 For this city hath been to me *as* a provocation of mine anger and of my fury from the day that they built it even unto this day; that I should remove it from before my face, 32 Because of all the evil of the children of Israel and of the children of Judah, which they have done to provoke me to anger, they, their kings, their princes, their priests, and their prophets, and the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 33 And they have turned unto me the back, and not the face: though I taught them, rising up early and teaching *them*, yet they have not hearkened to receive instruction. 34 But they set their abominations in the house, which is called by my name, to defile it. 35 And they built the high places of Baal, which *are* in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through *the fire* unto Molech; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin. 36 And now therefore thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning this city, whereof ye say, It shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword, and by the

famine, and by the pestilence; 37 Behold, I will gather them out of all countries, whither I have driven them in mine anger, and in my fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely: 38 And they shall be my people, and I will be their God: 39 And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: 40 And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. 41 Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart and with my whole soul. 42 For thus saith the LORD; Like as I have brought all this great evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them all the good that I have promised them. 43 And fields shall be bought in this land, whereof ye say, *It is desolate without man or beast; it is given into the hand of the Chaldeans.* 44 Men shall buy fields for money, and subscribe evidences, and seal *them*, and take witnesses in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, and in the cities of the mountains, and in the cities of the valley, and in the cities of the south: for I will cause their captivity to return, saith the LORD.

We have here God's answer to Jeremiah's prayer, designed to quiet his mind and make him easy; and it is a full discovery of the purposes of God's wrath against the present generation and the purposes of his grace concerning the future generations. Jeremiah knew not how to *sing both of mercy and judgment*, but God here teaches to sing unto him of both. When we know not how to reconcile one word of God with another we may yet be sure that both are true, both are pure, both shall be made good, and not one iota or tittle of either shall fall to the ground. When Jeremiah was ordered to buy the field in Anathoth he was willing to hope that God was about to revoke the sentence of his wrath and to order the Chaldeans to raise the siege. "No," says God, "the execution of the sentence shall go on; Jeru-

salem shall be laid in ruins." Note, Assurances of future mercy must not be interpreted as securities from present troubles. But, lest Jeremiah should think that his being ordered to buy this field intimated that all the mercy God had in store for his people, after their return, was only that they should have the possession of their own land again, he further informs him that that was but a type and figure of those spiritual blessings which should then be abundantly bestowed upon them, unspeakably more valuable than fields and vineyards; so that in this *word of the Lord*, which came to Jeremiah, we have first as dreadful threatenings and then as precious promises as perhaps any we have in the Old Testament; life and death, good and evil, are here set before us; let us consider and choose wisely.

I. The ruin of Judah and Jerusalem is here pronounced. The decree has gone forth, and shall not be recalled. 1. God here asserts his own sovereignty and power (v. 27): *Behold, I am Jehovah*, a self-existent self-sufficient being; *I am that I am; I am the God of all flesh*, that is, of all mankind, here called *flesh* because weak and unable to contend with God (Ps. lvi. 4), and because wicked and corrupt and unapt to comply with God. God is the Creator of all, and makes what use he pleases of all. He that is the God of Israel is the *God of all flesh and of the spirits of all flesh*, and, if Israel were cast off, could raise up a people to his name out of some other nation. If he be the *God of all flesh*, he may well ask, *Is any thing too hard for me?* What cannot he do from whom all the powers of men are derived, on whom they depend, and by whom all their actions are directed and governed? Whatever he designs to do, whether in wrath or in mercy, nothing can hinder him nor defeat his designs. 2. He abides by what he had often said of the destruction of Jerusalem by the king of Babylon (v. 28): *I will give this city into his hand*, now that he is grasping at it, and he shall take it and make a prey of it, v. 29. *The Chaldeans shall come and set fire to it*, shall burn it and all the *houses in it*, God's house not excepted, nor the king's neither. 3. He assigns the reason for these severe proceedings against the city that had been so much in his favour. It is sin, it is that and nothing else, that ruins it. (1.) They were impudent and daring in sin. They *offered incense to Baal*, not in corners, as men ashamed or afraid of being discovered, but upon the *tops of their houses* (v. 29), in defiance of God's justice. (2.) They designed an affront to God herein. They did it to *provoke me to anger*, v. 29. *They have only provoked me to anger with the works of their hands*, v. 30. They could not promise themselves any pleasure, profit, or honour out of it, but did it on purpose to offend God. And again (v. 32), *All the evil which they have done was to provoke me to anger.*



They knew he was a jealous God in the matters of his worship, and there they resolved to try his jealousy and dare him to his face. "Jerusalem has been to me a provocation of my anger and fury," v. 31. Their conduct in every thing was provoking. (3.) They began betimes, and had continued all along provoking to God: "They have done evil before me from their youth, ever since they were first formed into a people (v. 30), witness their murmurings and rebellions in the wilderness." And as for Jerusalem, though it was the *holy city*, it has been a *provocation* to the holy God from the day that they built it, even to this day, v. 31. O what reason have we to lament the little honour God has from this world, and the great dishonour that is done him, when even in Judah, where *he is known and his name is great*, and in Salem where his *tabernacle is*, there was always that found that was a provocation to him! (4.) All orders and degrees of men contributed to the common guilt, and therefore were justly involved in the common ruin. Not only the *children of Israel*, that had revolted from the temple, but the *children of Judah* too, that still adhered to it—not only the common people, the *men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem*, but those that should have reprov'd and restrained sin in others were themselves ring-leaders in it, their *kings and princes*, their *priests and prophets*. (5.) God had again and again called them to repentance, but they turned a deaf ear to his calls, and rudely turned their back on him that called them, though he was their master, to whom they were bound in duty, and their benefactor, to whom they were bound in gratitude and interest, v. 33. "*I taught them better manners, with as much care as ever any tender parent taught a child, rising up early, in teaching them, studying to adapt the teaching to their capacities, taking them betimes, when they might have been most pliable, but all in vain; they turned not the face to me, would not so much as look upon me, nay, they turned the back upon me,*" an expression of the highest contempt. *As he called them*, like froward children, *so they went from him*, Hos. xi. 2. *They have not hearkened to receive instruction*; they regarded not a word that was said to them, though it was designed for their own good. (6.) There was in their idolatries an impious contempt of God; for (v. 34) *they set their abominations* (their idols, which they knew to be in the highest degree abominable to God) *in the house which is called by my name, to defile it*. They had their idols not only in their high places and groves, but even in God's temple. (7.) They were guilty of the most unnatural cruelty to their own children; for they *sacrificed them to Moloch*, v. 35. Thus because they *liked not to retain God in their knowledge, but changed his glory into shame*, they were justly given up to vile

affections and stripped of natural ones, and their glory was turned into shame. And, (8.) What was the consequence of all this? [1.] *They caused Judah to sin*, v. 35. The whole country was infected with the contagious idolatries and iniquities of Jerusalem. [2.] They brought ruin upon themselves. It was as if they had done it on purpose that God should remove them from before his face (v. 31); they would throw themselves out of his favour.

II. The restoration of Judah and Jerusalem is here promised, v. 36, &c. God will in judgment remember mercy, and there will a time come, a set time, to favour Zion. Observe, 1. The despair to which this people were now at length brought. When the judgment was threatened at a distance they had no fear; when it attacked them they had no hope. They said concerning the city (v. 36), *It shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon*, not by any cowardice or ill conduct of ours, but by the sword, famine, and pestilence. Concerning the country they said, with vexation (v. 43), *It is desolate, without man or beast; there is no relief, there is no remedy. It is given into the hand of the Chaldeans*. Note, Deep security commonly ends in deep despair; whereas those that keep up a holy fear at all times have a good hope to support them in the worst of times. 2. The hope that God gives them of mercy which he had in store for them hereafter. Though their carcases must fall in captivity, yet their children after them shall again see this good land and the goodness of God in it. (1.) They shall be brought up from their captivity and shall come and settle again in this land, v. 37. They had been under God's *anger, and fury, and great wrath*; but now they shall partake of his grace, and love, and great favour. He had dispersed them, and *driven them into all countries*. Those that fled dispersed themselves; those that fell into the enemies' hands were dispersed by them, in policy, to prevent combinations among them. God's hand was in both. But now God will find them out, and *gather them out of all the countries whither they were driven*, as he promised in the law (Deut. xxx. 3, 4) and the saints had prayed, Ps. cvi. 47; Neh. i. 9. He had banished them, but he will *bring them again to this place*, which they could not but have an affection for. For many years past, while they were in their own land, they were continually exposed, and terrified with the alarms of war; but now *I will cause them to dwell safely*. Being reformed, and having returned to God, neither their own consciences within nor their enemies without shall be a terror to them. He promises (v. 41): *I will plant them in this land assuredly; not only I will certainly do it, but they shall here enjoy a holy security and repose, and they shall take root here, shall be planted in stability, and not again be unfixed and shaken*. (2.) God will renew his covenant with them, a cove-

nant of grace, the blessings of which are spiritual, and such as will work good things in them, to qualify them for the great things God intended to do for them. It is called an *everlasting covenant* (v. 40), not only because God will be for ever faithful to it, but because the consequences of it will be everlasting. For, doubtless, here the promises look further than to Israel according to the flesh, and are sure to all believers, to every Israelite indeed. Good Christians may apply them to themselves and plead them with God, may claim the benefit of them and take the comfort of them. [1.] God will own them for his, and make over himself to them to be theirs (v. 38): *They shall be my people*. He will make them his by working in them all the characters and dispositions of his people, and then he will protect, and guide, and govern them as his people. "And, to make them truly, completely, and eternally happy, *I will be their God*." They shall serve and worship God as theirs and cleave to him only, and he will approve himself theirs. All he is, all he has, shall be engaged and employed for their good. [2.] God will give them a heart to fear him, v. 39. That which he requires of those whom he takes into covenant with him as his people is that they fear him, that they reverence his majesty, dread his wrath, stand in awe of his authority, pay homage to him, and give him the glory due unto his name. Now what God requires of them he here promises to work in them, pursuant to his choice of them as his people. Note, As it is God's prerogative to fashion men's hearts, so it is his promise to his people to fashion theirs aright; and a heart to fear God is indeed a good heart, and well fashioned. It is repeated (v. 40): *I will put my fear in their hearts*, that is, work in them gracious principles and dispositions, that shall influence and govern their whole conversation. Teachers may put good things into our heads, but it is God only that can put them into our hearts, that can work in us *both to will and to do*. [3.] He will give them *one heart and one way*. In order to their walking in one way, he will give them one heart: as the heart is, so will the way be, and both shall be one; that is, *First*, They shall be each of them one with themselves. *One heart* is the same with a *new heart*, Ezek. xi. 19. The heart is *then* one when it is fully determined for God and entirely devoted to God. When the eye is single and God's glory alone aimed at, when our hearts are fixed, trusting in God, and we are uniform and universal in our obedience to him, then the heart is one and the way one; and, unless the heart be thus steady, the goings will not be steadfast. From this promise we may take direction and encouragement to pray, with David (Ps. lxxxvi. 11), *Unite my heart to fear thy name*; for God says, *I will give them one heart, that they may fear me*. *Secondly*, They shall be all of them one with each

other. All good Christians shall be incorporated into one body; Jews and Gentiles shall become *one sheep-fold*; and they shall all, as far as they are sanctified, have a disposition to love one another, the gospel they profess having in it the strongest inducements to mutual love, and the Spirit that dwells in them being the Spirit of love. Though they may have different apprehensions about minor things, they shall be all one in the great things of God, being renewed after the same image. Though they may have many paths, they have but *one way*, that of serious godliness. [4.] He will effectually provide for their perseverance in grace and the perpetuating of the covenant between himself and them. They would have been happy when they were first planted in Canaan, like Adam in paradise, if they had not departed from God. And therefore, now that they are restored to their happiness, they shall be confirmed in it by the preventing of their departures from God, and this will complete their bliss. *First*, God will never leave nor forsake them: *I will not turn away from them to do them good*. Earthly princes are fickle, and their greatest favourites have fallen under their frowns; but God's *mercy endures for ever*. *Whom he loves he loves to the end*. God may seem to turn from this people (Isa. liv. 8), but even then he does not turn from doing and designing them good. *Secondly*, They shall never leave nor forsake him; that is the thing we are in danger of. We have no reason to distrust God's fidelity and constancy, but our own; and therefore it is here promised that God will *give them a heart to fear him for ever*, all days, to be in his fear every day and all the day long (Prov. xxiii. 17), and to continue so to the end of their days. He will put such a principle into their hearts that they *shall not depart from him*. Even those who have given up their names to God, if they be left to themselves, will depart from him; but the fear of God ruling in the heart, will prevent their departure. That, and nothing else, will do it. If we continue close and faithful to God, it is owing purely to his almighty grace and not to any strength or resolution of our own. [5.] He will entail a blessing upon their seed, will give them grace to fear him, *for the good of them and of their children after them*. As their departures from God had been to the prejudice of their children, so their adherence to God should be to the advantage of their children. We cannot better consult the good of posterity than by setting up, and keeping up, the fear and worship of God in our families. [6.] He will take a pleasure in their prosperity and will do every thing to advance it (v. 41): *I will rejoice over them to do them good*. God will certainly do them good because he rejoices over them. They are dear to him; he makes his boast of them, and therefore will not only



do them good, but will delight in doing them good. When he punishes them it is with reluctance. *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?* But, when he restores them, it is with satisfaction; he rejoices in doing them good. We ought therefore to serve him with pleasure and to rejoice in all opportunities of serving him. He is himself a cheerful giver, and therefore loves a cheerful servant. *I will plant them* (says God) *with my whole heart and with my whole soul.* He will be intent upon it, and take delight in it; he will make it the business of his providence to settle them again in Canaan, and the various dispensations of providence shall concur to it. All things shall appear at last so to have been working for the good of the church that it will be said, The governor of the world is entirely taken up with the care of his church. [7.] These promises shall as surely be performed as the foregoing threatenings were; and the accomplishment of those, notwithstanding the security of the people, might confirm their expectation of the performance of these, notwithstanding their present despair (v. 42:) *As I have brought all this great evil upon them,* pursuant to the threatenings, and for the glory of divine justice, *so I will bring upon them all this good,* pursuant to the promise, and for the glory of divine mercy. He that is faithful to his threatenings will much more be so to his promises; and he will comfort his people according to the time that he has afflicted them. The churches shall have rest after the days of adversity. [8.] As an earnest of all this, houses and lands shall again fetch a good price in Judah and Jerusalem, and, though now they are a drug, there shall again be a sufficient number of purchasers (v. 43, 44): *Fields shall be bought in this land,* and people will covet to have lands here rather than any where else. Lands, wherever they lie, will go off, not only in the places about Jerusalem, but in the cities of Judah and of Israel too, whether they lie on mountains, or in valleys, or in the south, in all parts of the country, *men shall buy fields, and subscribe evidences.* Trade shall revive, for they shall have money enough to buy land with. Husbandry shall revive, for those that have money shall covet to lay it out upon lands. Laws shall again have their due course, for they shall *subscribe evidences and seal them.* This is mentioned to reconcile Jeremiah to his new purchase. Though he had bought a piece of ground and could not go to see it, yet he must believe that this was the pledge of many a purchase, and those but faint resemblances of the purchased possessions in the heavenly Canaan, reserved for all those who have God's fear in their hearts and do not depart from him.

## CHAP. XXXIII.

The scope of this chapter is much the same with that of the foregoing chapter—to confirm the promise of the restoration of the Jews, notwithstanding the present desolations of their country and dispensations of their people. And these promises have, both in type

and tendency, a reference as far forward as to the gospel church, to which this second edition of the Jewish church was at length to resign its dignities and privileges. It is here promised, I. That the city shall be rebuilt and re-established "in statu quo—in its former state," ver. 1–6. II. That the captives, having their sins pardoned, shall be restored, ver. 7, 8. III. That this shall redound very much to the glory of God, ver. 9. IV. That the country shall have both joy and plenty, ver. 10–14. V. That way shall be made for the coming of the Messiah, ver. 15, 16. VI. That the house of David, the house of Levi, and the house of Israel, shall flourish again, and be established, and all three in the kingdom of Christ; a gospel ministry and the gospel church shall continue while the world stands, ver. 17–21.

**M**OREOVER the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah the second time, while he was yet shut up in the court of the prison, saying, 2 Thus saith the LORD the maker thereof, the LORD that formed it, to establish it; the LORD is his name; 3 Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not. 4 For thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the houses of this city, and concerning the houses of the kings of Judah, which are thrown down by the mounts, and by the sword; 5 They come to fight with the Chaldeans, but it is to fill them with the dead bodies of men, whom I have slain in mine anger and in my fury, and for all whose wickedness I have hid my face from this city. 6 Behold, I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them, and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth. 7 And I will cause the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel to return, and will build them, as at the first. 8 And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me. 9 And it shall be to me a name of joy, and a praise and an honour before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them: and they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it.

Observe here, I. The date of this comfortable prophecy which God entrusted Jeremiah with. It is not exact in the time, only that it was after that in the foregoing chapter, when things were still growing worse and worse; it was the second time. *God speaketh once, yea, twice,* for the encouragement of his people. We are not only

so disobedient that we have need of *precept upon precept* to bring us to our duty, but so distrustful that we have need of promise upon promise to bring us to our comfort. This word, as the former, *came to Jeremiah when he was in prison*. Note, No confinement can deprive God's people of his presence; no locks nor bars can shut out his gracious visits; nay, oftentimes *as their afflictions abound their consolations much more abound*, and they have the most reviving communications of his favour when the world frowns upon them. Paul's sweetest epistles were those that bore date out of a prison.

II. The prophecy itself. A great deal of comfort is wrapped up in it for the relief of the captives, to keep them from sinking into despair. Observe,

1. Who it is that secures this comfort to them (v. 2): *It is the Lord, the maker thereof, the Lord that framed it*. He is the maker and former of heaven and earth, and therefore has all power in his hands; so it refers to Jeremiah's prayer, *ch. xxxii. 17*. He is the maker and former of Jerusalem, of Zion, built them at first, and therefore can rebuild them—built them for his own praise, and therefore *will*. He *formed it, to establish it*, and therefore it shall be established till those things be introduced which cannot be shaken, but shall remain for ever. He is the maker and former of this promise; he has laid the scheme for Jerusalem's restoration, and he that has formed it will establish it, he that has made the promise will make it good; for *Jehovah is his name*, a God giving being to his promises by the performance of them, and when he does this he is known by that name (*Exod. vi. 3*), a perfecting God. When the heavens and the earth were finished, then, and not till then, the Creator is called *Jehovah*, *Gen. ii. 4*.

2. How this comfort must be obtained and fetched in—by prayer (v. 3): *Call upon me, and I will answer thee*. The prophet, having received some intimations of this kind, must be humbly earnest with God for further discoveries of his kind intentions. He had prayed (*ch. xxxii. 16*), but he must pray again. Note, Those that expect to receive comforts from God must continue instant in prayer. We must call upon him, and then he will answer us. Christ himself must *ask, and it shall be given him*, *Ps. ii. 8*. *I will show thee great and mighty things* (give thee a clear and full prospect of them), *hidden things, which*, though in part discovered already, yet *thou knowest not*, thou canst not understand or give credit to. Or this may refer not only to the prediction of these things which Jeremiah, if he desire it, shall be favoured with, but to the performance of the things themselves which the people of God, encouraged by this prediction, must pray for. Note, Promises are given, not to supersede, but to quicken and encourage prayer. See *Ezek. xxxvi. 37*

3. How deplorable the condition of Jerusalem was which made it necessary that such comforts as these should be provided for it, and notwithstanding which its restoration should be brought about in due time (v. 4, 5): *The houses of this city, not excepting those of the kings of Judah, are thrown down by the mounts, or engines of battery, and by the sword, or axes, or hammers*. It is the same word that is used *Ezek. xxvi. 9*, *With his axes he shall break down thy towers*. The strongest stateliest houses, and those that were best furnished, were levelled with the ground. The fifth verse comes in in a parenthesis, giving a further instance of the present calamitous state of Jerusalem. Those that *came to fight with the Chaldeans*, to beat them off from the siege, did more hurt than good, provoked the enemy to be more fierce and furious in their assaults, so that the houses in Jerusalem were filled *with the dead bodies of men*, who died of the wounds they received in sallying out upon the besiegers. God says that they were such as he had *slain in his anger*, for the enemies' sword was his sword and their anger his anger. But, it seems, the men that were slain were generally such as had distinguished themselves by their wickedness, for they were the very men *for whose wickedness* God did now *hide himself from this city*, so that he was just in all he brought upon them.

4. What the blessings are which God has in store for Judah and Jerusalem, such as will redress all their grievances.

(1.) Is their state diseased? Is it wounded? God will provide effectually for the healing of it, though the disease was thought mortal and incurable, *ch. viii. 22*. *"The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint* (*Isa. i. 5*); but (v. 6) *I will bring it health and cure*; I will prevent the death, remove the sickness, and set all to rights again," *ch. xxx. 17*. Note, Be the case ever so desperate, if God undertake the cure, he will effect it. The sin of Jerusalem was the sickness of it (*Isa. i. 6*); its reformation therefore will be its recovery. And the following words tell us how that is wrought: *"I will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth*; I will give it to them in due time, and give them an encouraging prospect of it in the mean time." *Peace* stands here for all good; *peace and truth* are peace according to the promise and in pursuance of that: or *peace and truth* are peace and the true religion, peace and the true worship of God, in opposition to the many falsehoods and deceits by which they had been led away from God. We may apply it more generally, and observe, [1.] That peace and truth are the great subject-matter of divine revelation. These promises here lead us to the gospel of Christ, and in that God has revealed to us *peace and truth*, the method of true peace—truth to direct us, peace to make us easy. *Grace and truth*, and



abundance of both, *come by Jesus Christ*. Peace and truth are the life of the soul, and *Christ came that we might have that life, and might have it more abundantly*. Christ rules by the power of truth (John xviii. 37) and by it he gives *abundance of peace*, Ps. lxxii. 7; lxxxv. 10. [2.] That the divine revelation of peace and truth brings health and cure to all those that by faith receive it: it heals the soul of the diseases it has contracted, as it is a means of sanctification, John xvii. 17. *He sent his word and healed them*, Ps. cvii. 20. And it puts the soul into good order, and keeps it in a good frame and fit for the employments and enjoyments of the spiritual and divine life.

(2.) Are they scattered and enslaved, and is their nation laid in ruins? "*I will cause their captivity to return* (v. 7), both that of Israel and that of Judah" (for though those who returned under Zerubbabel were chiefly of Judah, and Benjamin, and Levi, yet afterwards many of all the other tribes returned), "*and I will rebuild them, as I built them at first*." When they by repentance do their first works God will by their restoration do his first works.

(3.) Is sin the procuring cause of all their troubles? That shall be pardoned and subdued, and so the root of the judgments shall be killed, v. 8. [1.] By sin they have become filthy, and odious to God's holiness, but God will cleanse them, and purify *them from their iniquity*. As those that were ceremonially unclean, and were therefore shut out from the tabernacle, when they were sprinkled with the *water of purification* had liberty of access to it again, so had they to their own land, and the privileges of it, when God had *cleansed them from their iniquities*. In allusion to that sprinkling, David prays, *Purge me with hyssop*. [2.] By sin they have become guilty, and obnoxious to his justice; but he will *pardon all their iniquities*, will remove the punishment to which for sin they were bound over. All who by sanctifying grace are cleansed from the filth of sin, by pardoning mercy are freed from the guilt of it.

(4.) Have both their sins and their sufferings turned to the dishonour of God? Their reformation and restoration shall redound as much to his praise, v. 9. Jerusalem thus rebuilt, Judah thus re-peopled, *shall be to me a name of joy*, as pleasing to God as ever they have been provoking, *and a praise and an honour before all the nations*. They, being thus restored, shall glorify God by their obedience to him, and he shall glorify himself by his favours to them. This renewed nation shall be as much a reputation to religion as formerly it has been a reproach to it. *The nations shall hear of all the good that God has wrought in them by his grace and of all the good he has wrought for them by his providence*. The wonders of their return out of Babylon shall make as great a noise

in the world as ever the wonders of their deliverance out of Egypt did. And *they shall fear and tremble for all this goodness*. [1.] The people of God themselves shall fear and tremble; they shall be much surprised at it, shall be afraid of offending so good a God and of forfeiting his favour. Hos. iii. 5, *They shall fear the Lord and his goodness*. [2.] The neighbouring nations shall fear because of the prosperity of Jerusalem, shall look upon the growing greatness of the Jewish nation as really formidable, and shall be afraid of making them their enemies. When the church is *fair as the moon, and clear as the sun*, she is *terrible as an army with banners*.

10 Thus saith the LORD; Again there shall be heard in this place, which ye say *shall be* desolate without man and without beast, *even* in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, that are desolate, without man, and without inhabitant, and without beast, 11 The voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that shall say, Praise the LORD of hosts: for the LORD is good; for his mercy *endureth* for ever: *and* of them that shall bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the LORD. For I will cause to return the captivity of the land, as at the first, saith the LORD. 12 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Again in this place, which is desolate without man and without beast, and in all the cities thereof, shall be an habitation of shepherds causing *their* flocks to lie down. 13 In the cities of the mountains, in the cities of the vale, and in the cities of the south, and in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, shall the flocks pass again under the hands of him that telleth *them*, saith the LORD. 14 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised unto the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. 15 In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. 16 In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell

safely: and this *is the name* where-with she shall be called, The LORD our righteousness.

Here is a further prediction of the happy state of Judah and Jerusalem after their glorious return out of captivity, issuing gloriously at length in the kingdom of the Messiah.

I. It is promised that the people who were long in sorrow shall again be filled with joy. Every one concluded now that the country would lie for ever desolate, that *no beasts* would be found in the land of Judah, no inhabitant *in the streets of Jerusalem*, and consequently there would be nothing but universal and perpetual melancholy (v. 10); but, though weeping may endure for a time, joy will return. It was threatened (ch. vii. 34 and xvi. 9) that *the voice of joy and gladness should cease* there; but here it is promised that they shall revive again, that *the voice of joy and gladness shall be heard* there, because *the captivity shall be returned*; for then was *their mouth filled with laughter*, Ps. cxvii. 1, 2. 1. There shall be common joy there, *the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride*; marriages shall again be celebrated, as formerly, with songs, which in Babylon they had laid aside, for their harps were hung on the willow-trees. 2. There shall be religious joy there; temple-songs shall be revived, *the Lord's songs*, which they could not *sing in a strange land*. There shall be heard in their private houses, and in the cities of Judah, as well as in the temple, *the voice of those that shall say, Praise the Lord of hosts*. Note, Nothing is more the praise and honour of a people than to have God praised and honoured among them. This shall complete the mercy of their return and restoration, that with it they shall have hearts to be thankful for it, and give God the glory of it, the glory both of the power and of the goodness by which it is effected; they shall praise him both as *the Lord of hosts* and as the God who *is good and whose mercy endures for ever*. This, though a song of old, yet, being sung upon this fresh occasion, will be a new song. We find this literally fulfilled at their return out of Babylon, Ezra iii. 11. They sang together in praising the Lord, *because he is good, for his mercy endures for ever*. The public worship of God shall be diligently and constantly attended upon: *They shall bring the sacrifice of praise to the house of the Lord*. All the sacrifices were intended for the praise of God, but this seems to be meant of the spiritual sacrifices of humble adorations and joyful thanksgivings, *the calves of our lips* (Hos. xiv. 2), which *shall please the Lord better than an ox or bullock*. The Jews say that in the days of the Messiah all sacrifices shall cease but *the sacrifice of praise*, and to those days this promise has a further reference

II. It is promised that the country, which had lain long depopulated, shall be replenished and stocked again. It was now desolate, *without man and without beast*; but, after their return, the pastures shall again be *clothed with flocks*, Ps. lxxv. 13. *In all the cities of Judah and Benjamin there shall be habitation of shepherds*, v. 12, 13. This intimates, 1. The wealth of the country after their return. It shall not be a habitation of beggars, who have nothing, but of shepherds and husbandmen, men of substance, with good stocks upon the ground they have returned to. 2. The peace of the country. It shall not be a habitation of soldiers, nor shall there be tents and barracks set up to lodge them, but there shall be shepherds' tents; for they shall hear no more the alarms of war, nor shall there be any to make even the shepherds afraid. See Ps. cxliv. 13, 14. 3. The industry of the country, and their return to their original plainness and simplicity, from which, in the corrupt ages, they had sadly degenerated. The seed of Jacob, in their beginning, gloried in this, that they were shepherds (Gen. xlvii. 3), and so they shall now be again, giving themselves wholly to that innocent employment, *causing their flocks to lie down* (v. 12) and to *pass under the hands of him that telleth them* (v. 13); for, though their flocks are numerous, they are not numberless, nor shall they omit to number them, that they may know if any be missing and may seek after it. Note, It is the prudence of those who have ever so much of the world to keep an account of what they have. Some think that they *pass under the hand of him that telleth them* that they may be tithed, Lev. xxvii. 32. Then we may take the comfort of what we have when God has had his dues out of it. Now because it seemed incredible that a people, reduced as now they were, should ever recover such a degree of peace and plenty as this, here is subjoined a general ratification of these promises (v. 14): *I will perform that good thing which I have promised*. Though the promise may sometimes work slowly towards an accomplishment, it works surely. *The days will come*, though they are long in coming.

III. To crown all these blessings which God has in store for them, here is a promise of the Messiah, and of that everlasting righteousness which he should bring in (v. 15, 16), and probably this is *that good thing*, that great good thing, which in the latter days, days that were yet to come, God would perform, as he had promised to Judah and Israel, and to which their return out of captivity and their settlement again in their own land was preparatory. *From the captivity to Christ* is one of the famous periods, Matt. i. 17. This promise of the Messiah we had before (ch. xxiii. 5, 6), and there it came in as a confirmation of the promise of the shepherds whom God would set over



them, which would make one think that the promise here concerning the shepherds and their flocks, which introduces it, is to be understood figuratively. Christ is here prophesied of, 1. As a rightful King. He is a *branch of righteousness*, not a usurper, for he *grows up unto David*, descends from his loins, with whom the covenant of royalty was made, and is that seed with whom that covenant should be established, so that his title is unexceptionable. 2. As a righteous king, righteous in enacting laws, waging wars, and giving judgment, righteous in vindicating those that suffer wrong and punishing those that do wrong: *He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land.* This may point at Zerubbabel, in the type, who governed with equity, not as Jehoiakim had done (*ch. xxii. 17*); but it has a further reference to him to whom all judgment is committed and who shall *judge the world in righteousness*. 3. As a king that shall protect his subjects from all injury. By him *Judah shall be saved* from wrath and the curse, and, being so saved, *Jerusalem shall dwell safely*, quiet from the fear of evil, and enjoying a holy security and serenity of mind, in a dependence upon the conduct of this prince of peace, this prince of their peace. 4. As a king that shall be praised by his subjects: "*This is the name whereby they shall call him*" (so the Chaldee reads it, the Syriac, and vulgar Latin); "this name of his they shall celebrate and triumph in, and by this name they shall call upon him." It may be read, more agreeably to the original, *This is he who shall call her*, *The Lord our righteousness*. As Moses's altar is called *Jehovah-nissi* (*Exod. xvii. 15*), and Jerusalem *Jehovah-shammah* (*Ezek. xlviii. 35*), intimating that they glory in Jehovah as present with them and their banner, so here the city is called *The Lord our righteousness*, because they glory in Jehovah as their righteousness. That which was before said to be the name of Christ (says Mr. Gataker) is here made the name of Jerusalem, the city of the Messiah, the church of Christ. He it is that imparts righteousness to her, for he is *made of God to us righteousness*, and she, by bearing that name, professes to have her whole righteousness, not from herself, but from him. *In the Lord have I righteousness and strength*, *Isa. xlv. 24*. And we are *made the righteousness of God in him*. The inhabitants of Jerusalem shall have this name of the Messiah so much in their mouths that they shall themselves be called by it.

17 For thus saith the LORD; David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel; 18 Neither shall the priests the Levites want a man before me to offer burnt-offerings, and to kindle meat-offerings, and to do sacrifice continually.

19 And the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah, saying, 20 Thus saith the LORD; If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; 21 Then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne; and with the Levites the priests, my ministers. 22 As the hosts of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured: so will I multiply the seed of David my servant, and the Levites that minister unto me. 23 Moreover the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, 24 Considerest thou not what this people have spoken, saying, The two families which the LORD hath chosen, he hath even cast them off? Thus they have despised my people, that they should be no more a nation before them. 25 Thus saith the LORD; If my covenant be not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth; 26 Then will I cast away the seed of Jacob, and David my servant, so that I will not take any of his seed to be rulers over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: for I will cause their captivity to return, and have mercy on them.

Three of God's covenants, that of royalty with David and his seed, that of the priesthood with Aaron and his seed, and that of peculiarity with Abraham and his seed, seemed to be all broken and lost while the captivity lasted; but it is here promised that, notwithstanding that interruption and discontinuance for a time, they shall all three take place again, and the true intents and meaning of them all shall be abundantly answered in the New Testament blessings, typified by those conferred on the Jews after their return out of captivity.

I. The covenant of royalty shall be secured and the promises of it shall have their full accomplishment in the kingdom of Christ, the Son of David, *v. 17*. The throne of Israel was overturned in the captivity; the crown had fallen from their head; there was not a man to sit on the throne of Israel; Jeconiah was written childless. After their return the house of David made a figure again; but it is in the Messiah that this promise is performed that *David shall never want a man to sit on the throne of Israel*, and that David shall have always a son to reign upon his throne. For as long as the man

Christ Jesus sits on the right hand of the throne of God, rules the world, and rules it for the good of the church, to which he is a quickening head, and glorified head over all things, as long as he is *King upon the holy hill of Zion*, David does not want a successor, nor is the covenant with him broken. When the first-begotten was brought into the world it was declared concerning him, *The Lord God shall give him the throne of his father David and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever*, Luke i. 32, 33. For the confirmation of this it is promised, 1. That the covenant with David shall be as firm as the ordinances of heaven, to the stability of which that of God's promise is compared, ch. xxxi. 35, 36. There is a covenant of nature, by which the common course of providence is settled and on which it is founded, here called *a covenant of the day and the night* (v. 20. 25), because this is one of the articles of it, That there shall be *day and night in their season*, according to the distinction put between them in the creation, when God divided between the light and the darkness, and established their mutual succession, and a government to each, that *the sun should rule by day and the moon and stars by night* (Gen. i. 4, 5, 16), which establishment was renewed after the flood (Gen. viii. 22), and has continued ever since, Ps. xix. 2. *The morning and the evening* have both of them their regular outgoings (Ps. lxxv. 8); *the day-spring knows its place, knows its time*, and keeps both, so do *the shadows of the evening*; and, while the world stands, this course shall not be altered, this covenant shall not be broken. *The ordinances of heaven and earth* (of this communication between heaven and earth, the dominion of these ordinances of heaven upon the earth), which God has appointed (v. 25; compare Job xxxviii. 33), shall never be disappointed. Thus firm shall the covenant of redemption be with the Redeemer—God's servant, but David our King, v. 21. This intimates that Christ shall have a church on earth to the world's end; he shall see a seed in which he shall prolong his days till time and day shall be no more. Christ's *kingdom is an everlasting kingdom*; and when *the end cometh*, and not till then, *it shall be delivered up to God, even the Father*. But it intimates that the condition of it in this world shall be intermixed and counterchanged, prosperity and adversity succeeding each other, as light and darkness, day and night. But this is plainly taught us, that, as sure as we may be that, though the sun will set to-night, it will rise again to-morrow morning, whether we live to see it or no, so sure we may be that, though the kingdom of the Redeemer in the world may for a time be clouded and eclipsed by corruptions and persecutions, yet it will shine forth again, and recover its lustre, in the time appointed.

2. That *the seed of David* shall be as numerous

*as the host of heaven*, that is, the spiritual seed of the Messiah, that shall be born to him by the efficacy of his gospel and his Spirit working with it. *From the womb of the morning he shall have the dew of their youth*, to be his *willing people*, Ps. cx. 3. Christ's seed are not, as David's were, his successors, but his subjects; yet the day is coming when they also shall reign with him (v. 22): *As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, so will I multiply the seed of David*, so that there shall be no danger of the kingdom's being extinct, or extirpated, for want of heirs. The children are numerous; and, *if children, then heirs*.

II. The covenant of priesthood shall be secured, and the promises of that also shall have their full accomplishment. This seemed likewise to be forgotten during the captivity, when there was no altar, no temple service, for the priests to attend upon; but this also shall revive. It did so; immediately upon their coming back to Jerusalem there were priests and Levites ready to offer *burnt-offerings* and to do *sacrifice continually* (Ezra iii. 2, 3), as is here promised, v. 18. But that priesthood soon grew corrupt; *the covenant of Levi was profaned* (as appears Mal. ii. 8), and in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans it came to a final period. We must therefore look elsewhere for the performance of this word, that the covenant with the Levites, the priests, God's ministers, shall be as firm, and last as long, as the covenant *with the day and the night*. And we find it abundantly performed, 1. In the priesthood of Christ, which supersedes that of Aaron, and is the substance of that shadow. While that great *high priest of our profession* is always appearing *in the presence of God for us*, presenting the virtue of his blood by which he made atonement in the incense of his intercession, it may truly be said that *the Levites do not want a man before God to offer continually*, Heb. vii. 3, 17. He is a priest for ever. The covenant of the priesthood is called *a covenant of peace* (Num. xxv. 12), of *life and peace*, Mal. ii. 5. Now we are sure that this covenant is not broken, nor in the least weakened, while Jesus Christ is himself our life and our peace. This covenant of priesthood is here again and again joined with that of royalty, for Christ is *a priest upon his throne*, as Melchizedek. 2. In a settled gospel ministry. While there are faithful ministers to preside in religious assemblies, and to offer up the spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise, *the priests, the Levites*, do not want successors, and such as *have obtained a more excellent ministry*. The apostle makes those that preach the gospel to come in the room of those that served at the altar, 1 Cor. ix. 13, 14. 3. In all true believers, who are *a holy priesthood, a royal priesthood* (1 Peter ii. 5, 9), who are *made to our God kings and priests* (Rev. i. 6); they *offer up spiritual*



sacrifices, acceptable to God, and themselves, in the first place, *living sacrifices*. Of these Levites this promise must be understood (v. 22), that they shall be as numerous as the sand of the sea, the same that is promised concerning Israel in general (Gen. xxii. 17); for all God's spiritual Israel are spiritual priests, Rev. v. 9, 10; vii. 9, 15.

III. The covenant of peculiarity likewise shall be secured and the promises of that covenant shall have their full accomplishment in the gospel Israel. Observe, 1. How this covenant was looked upon as broken: during the captivity, v. 24. God asks the prophet, "Hast thou not heard, and dost thou not consider, what this people have spoken?" either the enemies of Israel, who triumphed in the extirpation of a people that had made such a noise in the world, or the unbelieving Israelites themselves, "*this people among whom thou dwellest*;" they have broken covenant with God, and then quarrel with him as if he had not dealt faithfully with them. *The two families which the Lord hath chosen*, Israel and Judah, whereas they were but one when he chose them, *he hath even cast them off*. "*Thus have they despised my people*, that is, despised the privilege of being my people as if it were a privilege of no value at all." The neighbouring nations despised them as now *no more a nation*, but the ruins of a nation, and looked upon all their honour as laid in the dust; but, 2. See how firm the covenant stands notwithstanding, as firm as that with day and night; sooner will God suffer day and night to cease than he will *cast away the seed of Jacob*. This cannot refer to the seed of Jacob according to the flesh, for they are cast away, but to the Christian church, in which all these promises were to be lodged, as appears by the apostle's discourse, Rom. xi. 1, &c. Christ is that seed of David that is to be perpetual dictator to the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and, as this people shall never want such a king, so this king shall never want such a people. Christianity shall continue in the dominion of Christ, and the subjection of Christians to him, till day and night come to an end. And, as a pledge of this, that promise is again repeated, *I will cause their captivity to return*; and, having brought them back, *I will have mercy on them*. To whom this promise refers appears Gal. vi. 16, where all that *walk according to the gospel rule* are made to be the *Israel of God*, on whom *peace and mercy* shall be.

## CHAP. XXXIV.

In this chapter we have two messages which God sent by Jeremiah. I. One to foretell the fate of Zedekiah king of Judah, that he should fall into the hands of the king of Babylon, that he should live a captive, but should at last die in peace in his captivity, ver. 1-7. II. Another to read the doom both of prince and people for their treacherous dealings with God, in bringing back into bondage their servants whom they had released according to the law, and so playing fast and loose with God. They had walked at all adventures with God (ver. 8-11), and therefore God would walk at all adventures with them, in bringing the Chaldean army upon

them again when they began to hope that they had got clear of them, ver. 12-22.

THE word which came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and all his army, and all the kingdoms of the earth of his dominion, and all the people, fought against Jerusalem, and against all the cities thereof, saying, 2 Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Go and speak to Zedekiah king of Judah, and tell him, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire: 3 And thou shalt not escape out of his hand, but shalt surely be taken, and delivered into his hand; and thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with thee mouth to mouth, and thou shalt go to Babylon. 4 Yet hear the word of the LORD, O Zedekiah king of Judah; Thus saith the LORD of thee, Thou shalt not die by the sword: 5 But thou shalt die in peace: and with the burnings of thy fathers, the former kings which were before thee, so shall they burn odours for thee; and they will lament thee, saying, Ah lord! for I have pronounced the word, saith the LORD. 6 Then Jeremiah the prophet spake all these words unto Zedekiah king of Judah in Jerusalem, 7 When the king of Babylon's army fought against Jerusalem, and against all the cities of Judah that were left, against Lachish, and against Azekah: for these defended cities remained of the cities of Judah.

This prophecy concerning Zedekiah was delivered to Jeremiah, and by him to the parties concerned, before he was shut up in the prison, for we find this prediction here made the ground of his commitment, as appears by the recital of some passages out of it, ch. xxxii. 4. Observe,

I. The time when this message was sent to Zedekiah; it was *when the king of Babylon*, with all his forces, *came out of all the kingdoms of the earth* that were within his jurisdiction, *fought against Jerusalem and the cities thereof* (v. 1), designing to destroy them, having often plundered them. The cities that now remained, and yet held out, are named (v. 7), *Lachish and Azekah*. This intimates that things were now brought to the last extremity, and yet Zedekiah obsti-

rately stood it out, his heart being hardened to his destruction.

II. The message itself that was sent to him. 1. Here is a threatening of wrath. He is told that again which he had been often told before, that the city shall be taken by the Chaldeans and burnt with fire (v. 2), that he shall himself fall into the enemy's hands, shall be made a prisoner, shall be brought before that furious prince Nebuchadnezzar, and be carried away captive into Babylon (v. 3); yet Ezekiel prophesied that he *should not see Babylon*; nor did he, for his eyes were put out, Ezek. xii. 13. This Zedekiah brought upon himself from God by his other sins and from Nebuchadnezzar by breaking his faith with him. 2. Here is a mixture of mercy. He shall die a captive, but he *shall not die by the sword*; he shall die a natural death (v. 4); he shall end his days with some comfort, *shall die in peace*, v. 5. He never had been one of the worst of the kings, but we are willing to hope that what evil he had done in the sight of the Lord he repented of in his captivity, as Manasseh had done, and it was forgiven to him; and, God being reconciled to him, he might truly be said to die in peace. Note, A man may die in a prison and yet die in peace. Nay, he shall end his days with some reputation, more than one would expect, all things considered. He shall be buried with the burnings of his fathers, that is, with the respect usually shown to their kings, especially those that had done good in Israel. It seems, in his captivity he had conducted himself so well towards his own people that they were willing to do him this honour, and towards Nebuchadnezzar that he suffered it to be done. If Zedekiah had continued in his prosperity, perhaps he would have grown worse and would have departed at last without being desired; but his afflictions wrought such a change in him that his death was looked upon as a great loss. It is better to live and die penitent in a prison than to live and die impenitent in a palace. *They will lament thee, saying, Ah lord!* an honour which his brother Jehoia-kim had not, ch. xxii. 18. The Jews say that they lamented thus over him, *Alas! Zedekiah is dead, who drank the dregs of all the ages that went before him*, that is, who suffered for the sins of his ancestors, the measure of iniquity being filled up in his days. They shall thus lament him, *saitn the Lord, for I have pronounced the word*; and what God hath spoken shall without fail be made good.

III. Jeremiah's faithfulness in delivering this message. Though he knew it would be ungrateful to the king, and might prove, as indeed it did, dangerous to himself (for he was imprisoned for it), yet he *spoke all these words to Zedekiah*, v. 6. It is a mercy to great men to have those about them that will deal faithfully with them, and tell them

the evil consequences of their evil courses, that they may reform and live.

8 *This is* the word that came unto Jeremiah from the Lord, after that the king Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people which were at Jerusalem, to proclaim liberty unto them; 9 That every man should let his manservant, and every man his maidservant, *being* a Hebrew or a Hebrewess, go free; that none should serve himself of them, *to wit*, of a Jew his brother. 10 Now when all the princes, and all the people, which had entered into the covenant, heard that every one should let his manservant, and every one his maidservant, go free, that none should serve themselves of them any more, then they obeyed, and let them go. 11 But afterward they turned, and caused the servants and the handmaids, whom they had let go free, to return, and brought them into subjection for servants and for handmaids. 12 Therefore the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, 13 Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel; I made a covenant with your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondmen, saying, 14 At the end of seven years let ye go every man his brother a Hebrew, which hath been sold unto thee; and when he hath served thee six years, thou shalt let him go free from thee: but your fathers hearkened not unto me, neither inclined their ear. 15 And ye were now turned, and had done right in my sight, in proclaiming liberty every man to his neighbour; and ye had made a covenant before me in the house which is called by my name: 16 But ye turned and polluted my name, and caused every man his servant, and every man his handmaid, whom he had set at liberty at their pleasure, to return, and brought them into subjection, to be unto you for servants and for handmaids. 17 Therefore thus saith the Lord; Ye have not hearkened unto me, in proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother, and every man to his neigh-



bour: behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the LORD, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine; and I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth. 18 And I will give the men that have transgressed my covenant, which have not performed the words of the covenant which they had made before me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof, 19 The princes of Judah, and the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, and the priests, and all the people of the land, which passed between the parts of the calf; 20 I will even give them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life: and their dead bodies shall be for meat unto the fowls of the heaven, and to the beasts of the earth. 21 And Zedekiah king of Judah and his princes will I give into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life, and into the hand of the king of Babylon's army, which are gone up from you. 22 Behold, I will command, saith the LORD, and cause them to return to this city; and they shall fight against it, and take it, and burn it with fire: and I will make the cities of Judah a desolation without an inhabitant.

We have here another prophecy upon a particular occasion, the history of which we must take notice of, as necessary to give light to the prophecy.

1. When Jerusalem was closely besieged by the Chaldean army the princes and people agreed upon a reformation in one instance, and that was concerning their servants.

1. The law of God was very express, that those of their own nation should not be held in servitude above seven years, but, after they had served one apprenticeship, they should be discharged and have their liberty; yea, though they had sold themselves into servitude for the payment of their debts, or though they were sold by the judges for the punishment of their crimes. This difference was put between their brethren and strangers, that those of other nations taken in war, or bought with money, might be held in perpetual slavery, they and theirs; but their brethren must serve but for seven years at the longest. This God calls the covenant that he had made with them when he brought them out of the land of Egypt, v. 13, 14. This was the first of the judicial laws which God gave them (Exod. xxi. 2), and there was good reason for this law. (1.) God had put

honour upon that nation, and he would have them thus to preserve the honour of it themselves and to put a difference between it and other nations. (2.) God had brought them out of slavery in Egypt, and he would have them thus to express their grateful sense of that favour, by letting those go to whom their houses were houses of bondage, as Egypt had been to their forefathers. That deliverance is therefore mentioned here (v. 13) as the ground of that law. Note, God's compassions towards us should engage our compassions towards our brethren; we must release as we are released, forgive as we are forgiven, and relieve as we are relieved. And this is called a covenant; for our performance of the duty required is the condition of the continuance of the favours God has bestowed.

2. This law they and their fathers had broken. Their worldly profit swayed more with them than God's command or covenant. When their servants had lived seven years with them they understood their business, and how to apply themselves to it, better than they did when they first came to them, and therefore they would then by no means part with them, though God himself by his law had made them free: *Your fathers hearkened not to me in this matter* (v. 14), so that from the days of their fathers they had been in this trespass; and they thought they might do it because their fathers did it, and their servants had by disuse lost the benefit of the provision God made for them; whereas against an express law, especially against an express law of God, no custom, usage, nor prescription, is to be admitted in plea. For this sin of theirs, and their fathers, God now brought them into servitude, and justly.

3. When they were besieged, and closely shut in, by the army of the Chaldeans, they, being told of their fault in this matter, immediately reformed, and let go all their servants that were entitled to their freedom by the law of God, as Pharaoh, who, when the plague was upon him, consented to let the people go, and bound themselves in a covenant to do so. (1.) The prophets faithfully admonished them concerning their sin. From them they heard that they should let their Hebrew servants go free, v. 10. They might have read it themselves in the book of the law, but did not, or did not heed it, therefore the prophets told them what the law was. See what need there is of the preaching of the word; people must hear the word preached because they will not make the use they ought to make of the word written. (2.) All orders and degrees of men concurred in this reformation. The king, and the princes, and all the people, agreed to let go their servants, whatever loss or damage they might sustain by so doing. When the king and princes led in this good work the people could not for shame but follow. The example and influence of great men would ge

very far towards extirpating the most inveterate corruptions. (3.) They bound themselves by a solemn oath and covenant that they would do this, whereby they engaged themselves to God and one another. Note, What God has bound us to by his precept, it is good for us to bind ourselves to by our promise. This covenant was very solemn: it was made in a sacred place, *made before me, in the house which is called by my name* (v. 15), in the special presence of God, the tokens of which, in the temple, ought to strike an awe upon them and make them very sincere in their appeals to him. It was ratified by a significant sign; *they cut a calf in two, and passed between the parts thereof* (v. 18, 19) with this dreadful imprecation, "Let us be in like manner cut asunder if we do not perform what we now promise." This calf was probably offered up in sacrifice to God, who was thereby made a party to the covenant. When God covenanted with Abram, for the ratification of it, a *smoking furnace* and a *burning lamp* passed between the pieces of the sacrifice, in allusion to this federal rite, Gen. xv. 17. Note, In order that we may effectually oblige ourselves to our duty, it is good to alarm ourselves with the apprehensions of the terror of the wrath and curse to which we expose ourselves if we live in the contempt of it, that wrath which will *cut sinners asunder* (Matt. xxiv. 51), and sensible signs may be of use to make the impressions of it deep and durable, as here. (4.) They conformed themselves herein to the command of God and their covenant with him; they did *let their servants go*, though at this time, when the city was besieged, they could very ill spare them. Thus they did *right in God's sight*, v. 15. Though it was their trouble that drove them to it, yet he was well pleased with it; and if they had persevered in this act of *mercy to the poor*, to their poor servants, it might have been a lengthening of their tranquillity, Dan. iv. 27.

II. When there was some hope that the siege was raised and the danger over they repented of their repentance, undid the good they had done, and forced the servants they had released into their respective services again. 1. The king of Babylon's army had now *gone up from them*, v. 21. Pharaoh was bringing an army of Egyptians to oppose the progress of the king of Babylon's victories, upon the tidings of which the Chaldeans raised the siege for a time, as we find, ch. xxxvii. 5. *They departed from Jerusalem*. See how ready God was to put a stop to his judgments, upon the first instance of reformation, so slow is he to anger and so swift to show mercy. As soon as ever they let their servants go free God let them go free. 2. When they began to think themselves safe from the besiegers they made their servants come back into subjection to them, v. 11, and again v. 16. This was a great

abuse to their servants, to whom servitude would be more irksome, after they had had some taste of the pleasures of liberty. It was a great shame to themselves that they could not keep in a good mind when they were in it. But it was especially an affront to God; in doing this they *polluted his name*, v. 16. It was a contempt of the command he had given them, as if that were of no force at all, but they might either keep it or break it as they thought fit. It was a contempt of the covenant they had made with him, and of that wrath which they had imprecated upon themselves in case they should break that covenant. It was jesting with God almighty, as if he could be imposed upon by fallacious promises, which, when they had gained their point, they would look upon themselves no longer obliged by. It was *lying to God with their mouths and flattering him with their tongues*. It was likewise a contempt of the judgments of God and setting them at defiance; as if, when once the course of them was stopped a little and interrupted, they would never proceed again and the judgment would never be revived; whereas reprieves are so far from being pardons that if they be abused thus, and sinners take encouragement from them to return to sin, they are but preparatives for heavier strokes of divine vengeance.

III. For this treacherous dealing with God they are here severely threatened. *Be not deceived; God is not mocked*. Those that think to put a cheat upon God by a dissembled repentance, a fallacious covenant, and a partial temporary reformation, will prove in the end to have put the greatest cheat upon their own souls; for the Lord, whose name is *Jealous*, is a *jealous God*. It is here threatened, with an observable air of displeasure against them, 1. That, since they had not given liberty to their servants to go where they pleased, God would give all his judgments liberty to take their course against them without control (v. 17): *You have not proclaimed liberty to your servants*. Though they had done it (v. 10), yet they might truly be said not to have done it, because they did not stand to it, but undid it again; and *factum non dicitur quod non perseverat—that is not said to be done which does not last*. The righteousness that is forsaken and turned away from shall be forgotten, and *not mentioned* any more than if it had never been, Ezek. xviii. 24. "Therefore I will proclaim a liberty for you; I will discharge you from my service, and put you out of my protection, which those forfeit that withdraw from their allegiance. You shall have liberty to choose which of these judgments you will be cut off by, *sword, famine, or pestilence*;" such a liberty as was offered to David, which put him into a *great strait*, 2 Sam. xxiv. 14. Note, Those that will not be in subjection to the law of God put themselves into subjection to the wrath



and curse of God. But this shows what liberty to sin really is—it is but a liberty to the sorest judgments. 2. That, since they had brought their servants back into confinement in their houses, God would *make them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth*, where they should live in servitude, and, being strangers, could not expect the privileges of free-born subjects. 3. That, since they had broken the covenant which they ratified by a solemn imprecation, God would bring on them the evil which they imprecated upon themselves in case they should break it. Out of their own mouth will he judge them, and so shall their doom be; the penalty of their bond shall be recovered, because they have not performed the condition; for so some read v. 18, “*I will make the men which have transgressed my covenant as the calf which they cut in twain; I will divide them asunder as they divided it asunder.*” 4. That, since they would not let go their servants out of their hands, God would deliver them into the hands of those that hated them, even *the princes and nobles both of Judah and Jerusalem* (of the country and of the city), *the eunuchs* (chamberlains, or great officers of the court), *the priests, and all the people*, v. 19. They had all dealt treacherously with God, and therefore shall all be involved in the common ruin without exception. They shall all be *given into the hand of their enemies, that seek*, not their wealth only, or their service, but *their life*, and they shall have what they seek; but neither shall that content them: when they have their lives they shall leave *their dead bodies* unburied, a loathsome spectacle to all mankind and an easy prey to the *fowls and beasts*, a lasting mark of ignominy being hereby fastened on them, v. 20. 5. That, since they had emboldened themselves in returning to their sin, contrary to their covenant, by the retreat of the Chaldean army from them, God would therefore bring it upon them again: “*They have now gone up from you, and your fright is over for the present, but I will command them to face about as they were; they shall return to this city, and take it and burn it,*” v. 22. Note, (1.) As confidence in God is a hopeful preface of approaching deliverance, so security in sin is a sad omen of approaching destruction. (2.) When judgments are removed from a people before they have done their work, leave them, but leave them unhumiliated and unreformed, it is *cum animo revertendi—with a design to return*; they do but retreat to come on again with so much the greater force; for when God judges he will overcome. (3.) It is just with God to disappoint those expectations of mercy which his providence had given cause for when we disappoint those expectations of duty which our professions, pretensions, and fair promises, had given cause for. If we repent of the good we had purposed, God will re-

pent of the good he had purposed. *With the froward thou wilt show thyself froward.*

## CHAP. XXXV.

A variety of methods is tried, and every time turned, to awaken the Jews to a sense of their sin and to bring them to repentance and reformation. The scope and tendency of many of the prophet's sermons was to frighten them out of their disobedience, by setting before them what would be the end thereof if they persisted in it. The scope of this sermon, in this chapter, is to shame them out of their disobedience if they had any sense of honour left in them for a discourse of this nature to fasten upon. I. He sets before them the obedience of the family of the Rechabites to the commands which were left them by Josiah their ancestor, and how they persevered in that obedience and would not be tempted from it, ver. 1—11. II. With this he aggravates the disobedience of the Jews to God and their contempt of his precepts, ver. 12—15. III. He foretels the judgments of God upon the Jews for their impious disobedience to God, ver. 16, 17. IV. He assures the Rechabites of the blessing of God upon them for their pious obedience to their father, ver. 18, 19.

THE word which came unto Jeremiah from the LORD in the days of Jehoiaxim the son of Josiah king of Judah, saying, 2 Go unto the house of the Rechabites, and speak unto them, and bring them into the house of the LORD, into one of the chambers, and give them wine to drink. 3 Then I took Jaazaniah the son of Jeremiah, the son of Habaziah, and his brethren, and all his sons, and the whole house of the Rechabites; 4 And I brought them into the house of the LORD, into the chamber of the sons of Hanan, the son of Igdaliah, a man of God, which was by the chamber of the princes, which was above the chamber of Maaseiah the son of Shallum, the keeper of the door: 5 And I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites pots full of wine, and cups, and I said unto them, Drink ye wine. 6 But they said, We will drink no wine: for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons for ever: 7 Neither shall ye build house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have any: but all your days ye shall dwell in tents; that ye may live many days in the land where ye be strangers. 8 Thus have we obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab our father in all that he hath charged us, to drink no wine all our days, we, our wives, our sons, nor our daughters; 9 Nor to build houses for us to dwell in: neither have we vineyard, nor field, nor seed: 10 But we have dwelt in tents, and have obeyed, and done ac-

cording to all that Jonadab our father commanded us. 11 But it came to pass, when Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon came up into the land, that we said, Come, and let us go to Jerusalem for fear of the army of the Chaldeans, and for fear of the army of the Syrians: so we dwell at Jerusalem.

This chapter is of an earlier date than many of those before; for what is contained in it was said and done in the *days of Jehoiakim* (v. 1); but then it must be in the latter part of his reign, for it was after the king of Babylon with his army *came up into the land* (v. 11), which seems to refer to the invasion mentioned 2 Kings xxiv. 2, which was upon occasion of Jehoiakim's rebelling against Nebuchadnezzar. After the judgments of God had broken in upon this rebellious people he continued to deal with them by his prophets to turn them from sin, that his wrath might turn away from them. For this purpose Jeremiah sets before them the example of the Rechabites, a family that kept distinct by themselves and were no more numbered with the families of Israel than they with the nations. They were originally Kenites, as appears 1 Chron. ii. 55, *These are the Kenites that came out of Hemath, the father of the house of Rechab*. The Kenites, at least those of them that gained a settlement in the land of Israel, were of the posterity of Hobab, Moses's father-in-law, Judg. i. 16. We find them separated from the Amalekites, 1 Sam. xv. 6. See Judg. iv. 17. One family of these Kenites had their denomination from Rechab. His son, or a lineal descendant from him, was Jonadab, a man famous in his time for wisdom and piety. He flourished in the days of Jehu, king of Israel, nearly 300 years before this; for there we find him courted by that rising prince, when he affected to appear zealous for God (2 Kings x. 15, 16), which he thought nothing more likely to confirm people in the opinion of than to have so good a man as Jonadab ride in the chariot with him. Now here we are told,

I. What the rules of living were which Jonadab, probably by his last will and testament, in writing, and duly executed, charged his children, and his posterity after him throughout all generations, religiously to observe; and we have reason to think that they were such as he himself had all his days observed.

1. They were comprised in two remarkable precepts:—(1.) He forbade them to *drink wine*, according to the law of the Nazarites. Wine is indeed given to *make glad the heart of man* and we are allowed the sober and moderate use of it; but we are so apt to abuse it and get hurt by it, and a good man, who has his heart made continually glad with the *light of God's countenance*, has so little need of it for that pur-

pose (Ps. iv. 6, 7), that it is a commendable piece of self-denial either not to use it at all or very sparingly and medicinally, as Timothy used it, 1 Tim. v. 23. (2.) He appointed them to *dwell in tents*, and not to build houses, nor purchase lands, nor rent or occupy either, v. 7. This was an instance of strictness and mortification beyond what the Nazarites were obliged to. Tents were mean dwellings, so that this would teach them to be humble; they were cold dwellings, so that this would teach them to be hardy and not to indulge the body; they were movable dwellings, so that this would teach them not to think of settling or taking root any where in this world. They must dwell in tents *all their days*, not for a few days, as Israel at the feast of tabernacles, not only in summer days, as soldiers and shepherds, but *all their days*. They must from the beginning thus accustom themselves to endure hardness, and then it would be no difficulty to them, no, not under the decays of old age. Now,

2. Why did Jonadab prescribe these rules of living to his posterity? It was not merely to show his authority, and to exercise a dominion over them, by imposing upon them what he thought fit; but it was to show his wisdom, and the real concern he had for their welfare, by recommending to them what he knew would be beneficial to them, yet not tying them by any oath or vow, or under any penalty, to observe these rules, but only advising them to conform to this discipline as far as they found it for edification, yet to be dispensed with in any case of necessity, as here, v. 11. He prescribed these rules to them, (1.) That they might preserve the ancient character of their family, which, however looked upon by some with contempt, he thought its real reputation. His ancestors had addicted themselves to a pastoral life (Exod. ii. 16), and he would have his posterity keep to it, and not degenerate from it, as Israel had done, who originally were shepherds and dwelt in tents, Gen. xli. 34. Note, We ought not to be ashamed of the honest employments of our ancestors, though they were but mean. (2.) That they might comport with their lot and bring their mind to their condition. Moses had put them in hopes that they should be naturalized (Num. x. 32); but, it seems, they were not; they were still *strangers in the land* (v. 7), had no inheritance in it, and therefore must live by their employments, which was a good reason why they should accustom themselves to hard fare and hard lodging; for strangers, such as they were, must not expect to live as the landed men, so plentifully and delicately. Note, It is our wisdom and duty to accommodate ourselves to our place and rank, and not aim to live above it. What has been the lot of our fathers why may we not be content that it should be our lot, and live ac-



ording to it? *Mind not high things.* (3.) That they might not be envied and disturbed by their neighbours among whom they lived. If they that were strangers should live great, raise estates, and fare sumptuously, the natives would grudge them their abundance, and have a jealous eye upon them, as the Philistines had upon Isaac (Gen. xxvi. 14), and would seek occasions to quarrel with them and do them a mischief; therefore he thought it would be their prudence to keep low, for that would be the way to continue long—to live meanly, that they might *lie many days in the land where they were strangers.* Note, Humility and contentment in obscurity are often the best policy and men's surest protection. (4.) That they might be armed against temptations to luxury and sensuality, the prevailing sin of the age and place they lived in. Jonadab saw a general corruption of manners; the drunkards of Ephraim abounded, and he was afraid lest his children should be debauched and ruined by them; and therefore he obliged them to live by themselves, retired in the country; and, that they might not run into any unlawful pleasures, to deny themselves the use even of lawful delights. They must be very sober, and temperate, and abstemious, which would contribute to the health both of mind and body, and to their living many days, and easy ones, and such as they might reflect upon with comfort *in the land where they were strangers.* Note, The consideration of this, that we are strangers and pilgrims, should oblige us to abstain from all fleshly lusts, to live above the things of sense, and look upon them with a generous and gracious contempt. (5.) That they might be prepared for times of trouble and calamity. Jonadab might, without a spirit of prophecy, foresee the destruction of a people so wretchedly degenerated, and he would have his family provide, that, if they could not *in the peace thereof*, yet even in the midst of the troubles thereof, *they might have peace.* Let them therefore have little to lose, and then losing times would be the less dreadful to them: let them sit loose to what they had, and then they might with less pain be stripped of it. Note, Those are in the best frame to meet sufferings who are mortified to the world and live a life of self-denial. (6.) That in general they might learn to live by rule and under discipline. It is good for us all to do so, and to teach our children to do so. Those that have lived long, as Jonadab probably had done when he left this charge to his posterity, can speak by experience of the vanity of the world and the dangerous snares that are in the abundance of its wealth and pleasures, and therefore ought to be regarded when they warn those that come after them to stand upon their guard.

II. How strictly his posterity observed these rules, v. 8—10. They had in their

respective generations all of them obeyed the voice of Jonadab their father, had done according to all that he commanded them. They drank no wine, though they dwelt in a country where there was plenty of it; their wives and children drank no wine, for those that are temperate themselves should take care that all under their charge should be so too. They built no houses, tilled no ground, but lived upon the products of their cattle. This they did partly in obedience to their ancestor, and out of a veneration they had for his name and authority, and partly from the experience they themselves had of the benefit of living such a mortified life. See the force of tradition, and the influence that antiquity, example, and great names, have upon men, and how that which seems very difficult will by long usage and custom become easy and in a manner natural. Now, 1. As to one of the particulars he had given them in charge, we are here told how in a case of necessity they dispensed with the violation of it (v. 11): *When the king of Babylon came into the land with his army*, though they had hitherto dwelt in tents, they now quitted their tents, and came and dwelt in Jerusalem, and in such houses as they could furnish themselves with there. Note, The rules of a strict discipline must not be made too strict, but so as to admit of a dispensation when the necessity of a case calls for it, which therefore, in making vows of that nature, it is wisdom to provide expressly for, that the way may be made the more clear, and we may not afterwards be forced to say, *It was an error*, Eccles. v. 6. Commands of that nature are to be understood with such limitations. These Rechabites would have tempted God, and not trusted him, if they had not used proper means for their own safety in a time of common calamity, notwithstanding the law and custom of their family. 2. As to the other particular, we are here told how, notwithstanding the greatest urgency, they religiously adhered to it. Jeremiah took them into the temple (v. 2), into a *prophet's chamber*, there, rather than into the *chamber of the princes*, that joined to it, because he had a message from God, which would look more like itself when it was delivered in the *chambers of a man of God*. There he not only asked the Rechabites whether they would drink any wine, but he *set pots full of wine before them*, and cups to drink out of, made the temptation as strong as possible, and said, "*Drink you wine, you shall have it on free cost. You have broken one of the rules of your order, in coming to live at Jerusalem; why may you not break this too, and when you are in the city do as they there do?*" But they peremptorily refused. They all agreed in the refusal. "*No, we will drink no wine; for with us it is against the law.*" The prophet knew very well they would deny it, and, when they did, urged it no further, for he saw they were stedfastly resolved

Note, Those temptations are of no force with men of confirmed sobriety which yet daily overcome such as, notwithstanding their convictions, are of no resolution in the paths of virtue.

12 Then came the word of the LORD unto Jeremiah, saying, 13 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Go and tell the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Will ye not receive instruction to hearken to my words? saith the LORD. 14 The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, that he commanded his sons not to drink wine, are performed; for unto this day they drink none, but obey their father's commandment: notwithstanding I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but ye hearkened not unto me. 15 I have sent also unto you all my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them, saying, Return ye now every man from his evil way, and amend your doings, and go not after other gods to serve them, and ye shall dwell in the land which I have given to you and to your fathers: but ye have not inclined your ear, nor hearkened unto me. 16 Because the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have performed the commandment of their father, which he commanded them; but this people hath not hearkened unto me: 17 Therefore thus saith the LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring upon Judah and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the evil that I have pronounced against them: because I have spoken unto them, but they have not heard; and I have called unto them, but they have not answered. 18 And Jeremiah said unto the house of the Rechabites, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Because ye have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according unto all that he hath commanded you: 19 Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me for ever.

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intended but for a sign; now here we have the application of it.

I. The Rechabites' observance of their father's charge to them is made use of as an aggravation of the disobedience of the Jews to God. Let them see it and be ashamed. The prophet asks them, in God's name, "*Will you not at length receive instruction?*" v. 13. Will nothing affect you? Will nothing fasten upon you? Will nothing prevail to discover sin and duty to you? You see how obedient the Rechabites are to their father's commandment (v. 14); but you have not inclined your ear to me" (v. 15), though one might much more reasonably expect that the people of God should have obeyed him than that the sons of Jonadab should have obeyed him; and the aggravation is very high, for, 1. The Rechabites were obedient to one who was but a man like themselves, who had but the wisdom and power of a man, and was only the father of their flesh; but the Jews were disobedient to an infinite and eternal God, who had an absolute authority over them, as the Father of their spirits. 2. Jonadab was long since dead, and was ignorant of them, and could neither take cognizance of their disobedience to his orders nor give correction for it; but God lives for ever, to see how his laws are observed, and is in a readiness to revenge all disobedience. 3. The Rechabites were never put in mind of their obligations to their father; but God often sent his prophets to his people, to put them in mind of their duty to him, and yet they would not do it. This is insisted on here as a great aggravation of their disobedience: "*I have myself spoken to you, rising early and speaking* by the written word and the dictates and admonitions of conscience (v. 14); nay, *I have sent unto you all my servants the prophets*, men like yourselves, whose terrors shall not make you afraid, *rising up early and sending them* (v. 15), and yet all in vain." 4. Jonadab never did that for his seed which God had done for his people. He left them a charge, but left them no estate to bear the charge; but God had given his people a good land, and promised them that, if they would be obedient, they should still dwell in it, so that they were bound both in gratitude and interest to be obedient, and yet they would not hear, they would not hearken. (5.) God did not tie up his people to so much hardship, and to such instances of mortification, as Jonadab obliged his seed to; and yet Jonadab's orders were obeyed and God's were not.

II. Judgments are threatened, as often before, against Judah and Jerusalem, for their disobedience thus aggravated. The Rechabites shall rise up in judgment against them, and shall condemn them; for they very punctually performed the commandment of their father, and continued and persevered in their obedience to it (v. 16); but this people, this rebellious and gainsaying people,



have not hearkened unto me; and therefore (v. 17), because they have not obeyed the precepts of the word, God will perform the threatenings of it: "*I will bring upon them, by the Chaldean army, all the evil pronounced against them both in the law and in the prophets, for I have spoken to them, I have called to them*"—spoken in a still small voice to those that were near and called aloud to those that were at a distance, tried all ways and means to convince and reduce them—spoken by my word, called by my providence, both to the same purport, and yet all to no purpose; they have not heard nor answered."

III. Mercy is here promised to the family of the Rechabites for their steady and unanimous adherence to the laws of their house. Though it was only for the shaming of Israel that their constancy was tried, yet, being unshaken, it was found unto praise, and honour, and glory; and God takes occasion from it to tell them that he had favours in reserve for them (v. 18, 19) and that they should have the comfort of them. It is promised, 1. That the family shall continue as long as any of the families of Israel, among whom they were strangers and sojourners. It shall never want a man to inherit what they had, though they had no inheritance to leave. Note, Sometimes those that have the smallest estates have the most numerous progeny; but he that sends mouths will be sure to send meat. 2. That religion shall continue in the family: "*He shall not want a man to stand before me, to serve me.*" Though they are neither priests nor Levites, nor appear to have had any post in the temple service, yet in a constant course of regular devotion, they stand before God, to minister to him. Note, (1.) The greatest blessing that can be entailed upon a family is to have the worship of God kept up in it from generation to generation. (2.) Temperance, self-denial, and mortification to the world, do very much befriended the exercises of piety, and help to transmit the observance of them to posterity. The more dead we are to the delights of sense the better we are disposed for the service of God; but nothing is more fatal to the entail of religion in a family than pride and luxury.

## CHAP. XXXVI.

Here is another expedient tried to work upon this heedless and untoward people, but it is tried in vain. A roll of a book is provided, containing an abstract or abridgement of all the sermons that Jeremiah had preached to them, that they might be put in mind of what they had heard and might the better understand it, when they had it all before them at one view. Now here we have, I. The writing of this roll by Baruch, as Jeremiah dictated it, ver. 1-4. II. The reading of the roll by Baruch to all the people publicly on a fast-day (ver. 5-10), afterwards by Baruch to the princes privately (ver. 11-19), and lastly by Jehudi to the king, ver. 20. III. The burning of the roll by the king, with orders to prosecute Jeremiah and Baruch, ver. 22-25. IV. The writing of another roll, with large additions, particularly of Jehoiakim's doom and burning the former, ver. 27-32.

AND it came to pass in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, that this word came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, 2 Take thee a roll of a book,

and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee against Israel, and against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spake unto thee, from the days of Josiah, even unto this day. 3 It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin. 4 Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah; and Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the LORD, which he had spoken unto him, upon a roll of a book. 5 And Jeremiah commanded Baruch, saying, I am shut up; I cannot go into the house of the LORD: 6 Therefore go thou, and read in the roll, which thou hast written from my mouth, the words of the LORD in the ears of the people in the LORD's house upon the fasting-day: and also thou shalt read them in the ears of all Judah that come out of their cities. 7 It may be they will present their supplication before the LORD, and will return every one from his evil way: for great is the anger and the fury that the LORD hath pronounced against this people. 8 And Baruch the son of Neriah did according to all that Jeremiah the prophet commanded him, reading in the book the words of the LORD in the LORD's house.

In the beginning of Ezekiel's prophecy we meet with a roll written in vision, for discovery of the things therein contained to the prophet himself, who was to receive and digest them, Ezek. ii. 9, 10; iii. 1. Here, in the latter end of Jeremiah's prophecy, we meet with a roll written in fact, for discovery of the things contained therein to the people, who were to hear and give heed to them; for the written word and other good books are of great use both to ministers and people. We have here,

I. The command which God gave to Jeremiah to write a summary of his sermons, of all the reproofs and all the warnings he had given in God's name to his people, ever since he first began to be a preacher, in the thirteenth year of Josiah, to this day, which was in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, v. 2, 3. What had been only spoken must now be written, that it might be reviewed, and that it might spread the further and last the longer. What had been spoken at large,

with frequent repetitions of the same things, perhaps in the same words (which has its advantage one way), must now be contracted and put into less compass, that the several parts of it might be better compared together, which has its advantage another way. What they had heard once must be recapitulated, and rehearsed to them again, that what was forgotten might be called to mind again and what made no impression upon them at the first hearing might take hold of them when they heard it the second time. And what was perhaps already written, and published in single sermons, must be collected into one volume, that none might be lost. Note, The writing of the scripture is by divine appointment. And observe the reason here given for the writing of this roll (v. 3): *It may be the house of Judah will hear.* Not that the divine prescience was at any uncertainty concerning the event: with that there is no peradventure; God knew certainly that *they would deal very treacherously*, Isa. xlviii. 8. But the divine wisdom directed to this as a proper means for attaining the desired end: and, if it failed, they would be the more inexcusable. And, though God foresaw that they would not hear, he did not tell the prophet so, but prescribed this method to him as a probable one to be used, in the hopes that they would *hear*, that is, heed and regard what they heard, take notice of it and mix faith with it: for otherwise our hearing the word, though an angel from heaven were to read or preach it to us, would stand us in no stead. Now observe here, 1. What it is hoped they will thus hear: *All that evil which I purpose to do unto them.* Note, The serious consideration of the certain fatal consequences of sin will be of great use to us to bring us to God. 2. What it is hoped will be produced thereby: *They will hear, that they may return every man from his evil way.* Note, The conversion of sinners from their evil courses is that which ministers should aim at in preaching; and people hear the word in vain if that point be not gained with them. To what purpose do we hear of the evil God will bring upon us for sin if we continue, notwithstanding, to do evil against him? 3. Of what vast advantage their consideration and conversion will be to them: *That I may forgive their iniquity.* This plainly implies the honour of God's justice, with which it is not consistent that he should forgive the sin unless the sinner repent of it and turn from it; but it plainly expresses the honour of his mercy, that he is very ready to forgive sin and only waits till the sinner be qualified to receive forgiveness, and therefore uses various means to bring us to repentance, *that he may forgive.*

II. The instructions which Jeremiah gave to Baruch his scribe, pursuant to the command he had received from God, and the writing of the roll accordingly, v. 4. God bade Jeremiah write, but, it should seem,

he had not the *pen of a ready writer*, he could not write fast, or fair, so as Baruch could, and therefore he made use of him as his amanuensis. St. Paul wrote but few of his epistles with his own hand, Gal. vi. 11; Rom. xvi. 22. God dispenses his gifts variously; some have a good faculty at speaking, others at writing, and neither can say to the other, *We have no need of you*, 1 Cor. xii. 21. The Spirit of God dictated to Jeremiah, and he to Baruch, who had been employed by Jeremiah as trustee for him in his purchase of the field (*ch. xxxii. 12*) and now was advanced to be his scribe and substitute in his prophetic office; and, if we may credit the apocryphal book that bears his name, he was afterwards himself a prophet to the captives in Babylon. Those that begin low are likely to rise high, and it is good for those that are designed for prophets to have their education under prophets and to be serviceable to them. Baruch wrote what Jeremiah dictated in a *roll of a book*, on pieces of parchment, or vellum, which were joined together, the top of one to the bottom of the other, so making one long scroll, which was rolled perhaps upon a staff.

III. The orders which Jeremiah gave to Baruch to read what he had written to the people. Jeremiah, it seems, was *shut up*, and *could not go to the house of the Lord* himself, v. 5. Though he was not a close prisoner, for then there would have been no occasion to send officers to seize him (v. 26), yet he was forbidden by the king to appear in the temple, was shut out thence, where he might be serving God and doing good, which was as bad to him as if he had been shut up in a dungeon. Jehoiakim was ripening apace for ruin when he thus silenced God's faithful messengers. But, when Jeremiah could not go to the temple himself, he sent one that was deputed by him to read to the people what he would himself have said. Thus St. Paul wrote epistles to the churches which he could not visit in person. Nay, it was what he himself had often said to them. Note, The writing and repeating of the sermons that have been preached may contribute very much towards the answering of the great ends of preaching. What we have heard and known it is good for us to hear again, that we may know it better. To preach and write the same thing is safe and profitable, and many times very necessary (Phil. iii. 1), and we must be glad to hear a good word from God, though we have it, as here, at second hand. Both ministers and people must do what they can when they cannot do what they would. Observe, When God ordered the reading of the roll he said, *It may be they will hear and return from their evil ways*, v. 3. When Jeremiah orders it, he says, *It may be they will pray* (they will present their supplications before the Lord) and will return from their evil way. Note, Prayer to God for grace to turn us is neces-



sary in order to our turning; and those that are convinced by the word of God of the necessity of returning to him will present their supplications to him for that grace. And the consideration of this, that *great is the anger which God has pronounced against us* for sin, should quicken both our prayers and our endeavours. Now, according to these orders, Baruch did read out of the book the words of the Lord, whenever there was a holy convocation, v. 8.

9 And it came to pass in the fifth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, in the ninth month, that they proclaimed a fast before the Lord to all the people in Jerusalem, and to all the people that came from the cities of Judah unto Jerusalem. 10 Then read Baruch in the book the words of Jeremiah in the house of the Lord, in the chamber of Gemariah the son of Shaphan the scribe, in the higher court, at the entry of the new gate of the Lord's house, in the ears of all the people. 11 When Michaiah the son of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, had heard out of the book all the words of the Lord, 12 Then he went down into the king's house, into the scribe's chamber: and, lo, all the princes sat there, *even* Elishama the scribe, and Delaiah the son of Shemaiah, and Elnathan the son of Achbor, and Gemariah the son of Shaphan, and Zedekiah the son of Hananiah, and all the princes. 13 Then Michaiah declared unto them all the words that he had heard, when Baruch read the book in the ears of the people. 14 Therefore all the princes sent Jehudi the son of Nethaniah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Cushi, unto Baruch, saying, Take in thine hand the roll wherein thou hast read in the ears of the people, and come. So Baruch the son of Neriah took the roll in his hand, and came unto them. 15 And they said unto him, Sit down now, and read it in our ears. So Baruch read it in their ears. 16 Now it came to pass, when they had heard all the words, they were afraid both one and other, and said unto Baruch, We will surely tell the king of all these words. 17 And they asked Baruch, saying, Tell us now, How didst thou write all

these words at his mouth? 18 Then Baruch answered them, He pronounced all these words unto me with his mouth, and I wrote *them* with ink in the book. 19 Then said the princes unto Baruch, Go, hide thee, thou and Jeremiah; and let no man know where ye be.

It should seem that Baruch had been frequently reading out of the book, to all companies that would give him the hearing, before the most solemn reading of it altogether which is here spoken of; for the directions were given about it in the *fourth year of Jehoiakim*, whereas this was done in the *fifth year*, v. 9. But some think that the writing of the book fairly over took up so much time that it was another year ere it was perfected; and yet perhaps it might not be past a month or two; he might begin in the latter end of the fourth year and finish it in the beginning of the fifth, for the *ninth month* refers to the computation of the year in general, not to the year of that reign. Now observe here, 1. The government appointed a public fast to be religiously observed (v. 9), on account either of the distress they were brought into by the army of the Chaldeans or of the want of rain (ch. xiv. 1): *They proclaimed a fast to the people*; whether the king and princes, or the priests, ordered this fast, is not certain; but it was plain that God by his providence called them aloud to it. Note, Great shows of piety and devotion may be found even among those who, though they keep up these *forms of godliness*, are strangers and enemies to the *power* of it. But what will such hypocritical services avail? Fasting, without reforming and turning away from sin, will never turn away the judgments of God, Jon. iii. 10. Notwithstanding this fast, God proceeded in his controversy with this people. 2. Baruch repeated Jeremiah's sermons publicly in the house of the Lord, on the fast-day. He stood in a chamber that belonged to Gemariah, and out of a window, or balcony, read to the people that were in the court, v. 10. Note, When we are speaking to God we must be willing to hear from him; and therefore, on days of fasting and prayer, it is requisite that the word be read and preached. *Hearken unto me, that God may hearken unto you.* Judg. ix. 7. For our help in suing out mercy and grace, it is proper that we should be told of sin and duty. 3. An account was brought of this to the princes that attended the court and were now together in the secretary's office, here called the *scribe's chamber*, v. 12. It should seem, though the princes had called the people to meet in the house of God, to fast, and pray, and hear the word, they did not think fit to attend there themselves, which was a sign that it was not from a principle of true devotion, but merely

for fashion-sake, that they proclaimed this fast. We are willing to hope that it was not with a bad design, to bring Jeremiah into trouble for his preaching, but with a good design, to bring the princes into trouble for their sins, that Michaiah informed the princes of what Baruch had read; for his father Gemariah so far countenanced Baruch as to lend him his chamber to read out of. Michaiah finds the princes sitting in the scribe's chamber, and tells them they had better have been where he had been, hearing a good sermon in the temple, which he gives them the heads of. Note, When we have heard some good word that has affected and edified us we should be ready to communicate it to others that did not hear it, for their edification. *Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.* 4. Baruch is sent for, and is ordered to sit down among them and read it all over again to them (v. 14, 15), which he readily did, not complaining that he was weary with his public work and therefore desiring to be excused, nor upbraiding the princes with their being absent from the temple, where they might have heard it when he read it there. Note, God's ministers must become all things to all men, if by any means they may gain some, must comply with them in circumstances, that they may secure the substance. St. Paul preached privately to those of reputation, Gal. ii. 2. 5. The princes were for the present much affected with the word that was read to them, v. 16. Observe, *They heard all the words*; they did not interrupt him, but very patiently attended to the reading of the whole book; for otherwise how could they form a competent judgment of it? And, *when they had heard all, they were afraid*, were all afraid, one as well as another; like Felix, who trembled at Paul's reasonings. The reproofs were just, the threatenings terrible, and the predictions now in a fair way to be fulfilled; so that, laying all together, they were in a great consternation. We are not told what impressions this reading of the roll made upon the people (v. 10), but the princes were put into a fright by it, and (as some read it) *looked one upon another*, not knowing what to say. They were all convinced that it was worthy to be regarded, but none of them had courage to second it, only they agreed to *tell the king of all these words*; and, if he think fit to give credit to them, they will, otherwise not, no, though it were to prevent the ruin of the nation. And yet at the same time they knew the king's mind so far that they advised Baruch and Jeremiah to hide themselves (v. 19) and to shift as they could for their own safety, expecting no other than that the king, instead of being convinced, would be exasperated. Note, It is common for sinners, under convictions, to endeavour to shake them off, by shifting off the prosecution of them to other persons, as these princes here, or to another more convenient

season, as Felix. 6. They asked Baruch a trifling question, *How he wrote all these words* (v. 17), as if they suspected there was something extraordinary in it; but Baruch gives them a plain answer, that there was nothing but what was common in the manner of the writing—Jeremiah dictated, and he wrote, v. 18. But thus it is common for those who would avoid the convictions of the word of God to start needless questions about the way and manner of the inspiration of it.

20 And they went in to the king into the court, but they laid up the roll in the chamber of Elishama the scribe, and told all the words in the ears of the king. 21 So the king sent Jehudi to fetch the roll: and he took it out of Elishama the scribe's chamber. And Jehudi read it in the ears of the king, and in the ears of all the princes which stood beside the king. 22 Now the king sat in the winter house in the ninth month: and *there was a fire* on the hearth burning before him. 23 And it came to pass, *that* when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that *was* on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that *was* on the hearth. 24 Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, *neither* the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words. 25 Nevertheless Elnathan and Delaiah and Gemariah had made intercession to the king that he would not burn the roll: but he would not hear them. 26 But the king commanded Jerahmeel the son of Hammelech, and Seraiah the son of Azriel, and Shelemiah the son of Abdeel, to take Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet: but the LORD hid them. 27 Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, after that the king had burned the roll, and the words which Baruch wrote at the mouth of Jeremiah, saying, 28 Take thee again another roll, and write in it all the former words that were in the first roll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah hath burned. 29 And thou shalt say to Jehoiakim king of Judah, Thus saith the LORD; Thou hast burned this roll, saying, Why hast thou written therein, saying, The king of Babylon



shall certainly come and destroy this land, and shall cause to cease from thence man and beast? 30 Therefore thus saith the LORD of Jehoiakim king of Judah; He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost. 31 And I will punish him and his seed and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring upon them, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and upon the men of Judah, all the evil that I have pronounced against them; but they hearkened not. 32 Then took Jeremiah another roll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah; who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire: and there were added besides unto them many like words.

We have traced the roll to the people, and to the princes, and here we are to follow it to the king; and we find,

I. That, upon notice given him concerning it, he sent for it, and ordered it to be read to him, v. 20, 21. He did not desire that Baruch would come and read it himself, who could read it more intelligently and with more authority and affection than any one else; nor did he order one of his princes to do it (though it would have been no disparagement to the greatest of them), much less would he vouchsafe to read it himself; but Jehudi, one of his pages now in waiting, who was sent to fetch it, is bidden to read it, who perhaps scarcely knew how to make sense of it. But those who thus despise the word of God will soon make it to appear, as this king did, that they hate it too, and have not only low, but ill thoughts of it.

II. That he had not patience to hear it read through as the princes had, but, when he had heard *three or four leaves* read, in a rage he *cut it with his penknife*, and threw it piece by piece *into the fire*, that he might be sure to see it *all consumed*, v. 22, 23. This was a piece of as daring impiety as a man could lightly be guilty of, and a most impudent affront to the God of heaven, whose message this was. 1. Thus he showed his impatience of reproof; being resolved to persist in sin, he would by no means bear to be told of his faults. 2. Thus he showed his indignation at Baruch and Jeremiah; he would have cut them in pieces, and burnt them, if he had had them in his reach, when he was in this passion. 3. Thus he expressed an obstinate resolution never to comply with the designs and intentions of the warnings

given him; he will do what he will, whatever God by his prophets says to the contrary. 4. Thus he foolishly hoped to defeat the threatenings denounced against him, as if God knew not how to execute the sentence when the roll was gone in which it was written. 5. Thus he thought he had effectually provided that the things contained in this roll should spread no further, which was the care of the chief priests concerning the gospel, Acts iv. 17. They had told him how this roll had been read to the people and to the princes. "But," says he, "I will take a course that shall prevent its being read any more." See what an enmity there is against God in the carnal mind, and wonder at the patience of God, that he bears with such indignities done to him.

III. That neither the king himself nor any of his princes were at all affected with the word: *They were not afraid* (v. 24), no, not those princes that *trembled at the word* when they heard it the first time, v. 16. So soon, so easily, do good impressions wear off. They showed some concern till they saw how light the king made of it, and then they shook off all that concern. *They rent not their garments*, as Josiah, this Jehoiakim's own father, did when he had the *book of the law* read to him, though it was not so particular as the contents of this roll were, nor so immediately adapted to the present posture of affairs.

IV. That there were three of the princes who had so much sense and grace left as to interpose for the preventing of the burning of the roll, but in vain, v. 25. If they had from the first shown themselves, as they ought to have done, affected with the word, perhaps they might have brought the king to a better mind and have persuaded him to bear it patiently; but frequently those that will not do the good they should put it out of their own power to do the good they would.

V. That Jehoiakim, when he had thus in effect burnt God's warrant by which he was arrested, as it were in a way of revenge, now that he thought he had got the better, signed a warrant for the apprehending of Jeremiah and Baruch, God's ministers (v. 26): *But the Lord hid them*. The princes bade them abscond (v. 19), but it was neither the princes' care for them nor theirs for themselves that secured them; it was under the divine protection that they were safe. Note, God will find out a shelter for his people, though their persecutors be ever so industrious to get them into their power, till their hour be come; nay, and then he will himself be their hiding place.

VI. That Jeremiah had orders and instructions to write in another roll the same words that were written in the roll which Jehoiakim had burnt, v. 27, 28. Note, Though the attempts of hell against the word of God are very daring, yet not one

iota or tittle of it shall fall to the ground, nor shall the unbelief of man make the word of God of no effect. Enemies may prevail to burn many a Bible, but they cannot abolish the word of God, can neither extirpate it nor defeat the accomplishment of it. Though the tables of the law were broken, they were renewed again; and so out of the ashes of the roll that was burnt arose another Phœnix. *The word of the Lord endures for ever.*

VII. That the king of Judah, though a king, was severely reckoned with by the King of kings for this indignity done to the written word. God noticed what it was in the roll that Jehoiakim took so much offence at. Jehoiakim was angry because it was *written therein, saying, Surely the king of Babylon shall come and destroy this land,* v. 29. And did not the king of Babylon come two years before this, and go far towards the destroying of this land? He did so (2 Chron. xxxvi. 6, 7) in his third year, Dan. i. 1. So that God and his prophets had *therefore become his enemies because they told him the truth*, told him of the desolation that was coming, but at the same time putting him into a fair way to prevent it. But, if this be the thing he takes so much amiss, let him know, 1. That the wrath of God shall come upon him and his family, in the first place, by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. He shall be cut off, and in a few weeks his son shall be dethroned, and exchange his royal robes for prison-garments, so that *he shall have none to sit upon the throne of David*; the glory of that illustrious house shall be eclipsed, and die in him; *his dead body shall lie unburied*, or, which comes all to one, *he shall be buried with the burial of an ass*, that is, thrown into the next ditch; it shall lie exposed to all weathers, *heat and frost*, which will occasion its putrefying and becoming loathsome the sooner. "Not that his body" (says Mr. Gataker) "could be sensible of such usage, or himself, being deceased, of aught that should befall his body; but that the king's body in such a condition should be a hideous spectacle, and a horrid monument of God's heavy wrath and indignation against him, unto all that should behold it." Even *his seed and his servants* shall fare the worse for their relation to him (v. 31), for they shall be punished, not for his iniquity, but so much the sooner for their own. 2. That all the evil pronounced against Judah and Jerusalem in that roll shall be brought upon them. Though the copy be burnt, the original remains in the divine counsel, which shall again be copied out after another manner in bloody characters. Note, There is no escaping God's judgments by struggling with them. *Who ever hardened his heart against God, and prospered?*

VIII. That, when the roll was written anew, *there were added* to the former *many like words* (v. 32), many more threatenings

of wrath and vengeance; for, since they will yet *walk contrary to God*, he will *heat the furnace seven times hotter*. Note, As God is in one mind, and none can turn him, so he has still more arrows in his quiver; and those who contend with God's woes do but prepare for themselves heavier of the same kind.

## CHAP. XXXVII.

This chapter brings us very near the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, for the story of it lies in the latter end of Zedekiah's reign; we have in it, I. A general idea of the bad character of that reign, ver. 1, 2. II. The message which Zedekiah, notwithstanding, sent to Jeremiah to desire his prayers, ver. 3. III. The flattering hopes which the people had conceived, that the Chaldeans would quit the siege of Jerusalem, ver. 5. IV. The assurance God gave them by Jeremiah (who was now at liberty, ver. 4) that the Chaldean army should renew the siege and take the city, ver. 6—10. V. The imprisonment of Jeremiah, under pretence that he was a deserter, ver. 11—15. VI. The kindness which Zedekiah showed him when he was a prisoner, ver. 16—21.

AND king Zedekiah the son of Josiah reigned instead of Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, whom Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon made king in the land of Judah. 2 But neither he, nor his servants, nor the people of the land, did hearken unto the words of the LORD, which he spake by the prophet Jeremiah. 3 And Zedekiah the king sent Jehucal the son of Shelemiah and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest to the prophet Jeremiah, saying, Pray now unto the LORD our God for us. 4 Now Jeremiah came in and went out among the people: for they had not put him into prison. 5 Then Pharaoh's army was come forth out of Egypt: and when the Chaldeans that besieged Jerusalem heard tidings of them, they departed from Jerusalem. 6 Then came the word of the LORD unto the prophet Jeremiah, saying, 7 Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Thus shall ye say to the king of Judah, that sent you unto me to enquire of me; Behold, Pharaoh's army, which is come forth to help you, shall return to Egypt into their own land. 8 And the Chaldeans shall come again, and fight against this city, and take it, and burn it with fire. 9 Thus saith the LORD; Deceive not yourselves, saying, The Chaldeans shall surely depart from us: for they shall not depart. 10 For though ye had smitten the whole army of the Chaldeans that fight against you, and there remained *but* wounded men among them, *yet* should they rise up



every man in his tent, and burn this city with fire.

Here is, 1. Jeremiah's preaching slighted, v. 1, 2. Zedekiah succeeded Coniah, or Jeconiah, and, though he saw in his predecessor the fatal consequences of contemning the word of God, yet he did not take warning, nor give any more regard to it than others had done before him. *Neither he, nor his courtiers, nor the people of the land, hearkened unto the words of the Lord,* though they already began to be fulfilled. Note, Those have hearts wretchedly hard indeed that see God's judgments on others, and feel them on themselves, and yet will not be humbled and brought to heed what he says. These had proof sufficient that it was the Lord who spoke by Jeremiah the prophet, and yet they would not hearken to him. 2. Jeremiah's prayers desired. Zedekiah sent messengers to him, saying, *Pray now unto the Lord our God for us.* He did so before (*ch. xxi. 1, 2*), and one of the messengers, Zephaniah, is the same there and here. Zedekiah is to be commended for this, and it shows that he had some good in him, some sense of his need of God's favour and of his own unworthiness to ask it for himself, and some value for good people and good ministers, who had an interest in Heaven. Note, When we are in distress we ought to desire the prayers of our ministers and Christian friends, for thereby we put an honour upon prayer, and an esteem upon our brethren. Kings themselves should look upon their praying people as the strength of the nation, *Zech. xii. 5, 10.* And yet this does but help to condemn Zedekiah out of his own mouth. If indeed he looked upon Jeremiah as a prophet, whose prayers might avail much both for him and his people, why did he not then believe him, and *hearken to the words of the Lord* which he spoke by him? He desired his good prayers, but would not take his good counsel, nor be ruled by him, though he spoke in God's name, and it appears by this that Zedekiah knew he did. Note, It is common for those to desire to be prayed for who yet will not be advised; but herein they put a cheat upon themselves, for how can we expect that God should hear others speaking to him for us if we will not hear them speaking to us from him and for him? Many who despise prayer when they are in prosperity will be glad of it when they are in adversity. Now *give us of your oil.* When Zedekiah sent to the prophet to pray for him, he had better have sent for the prophet to pray with him; but he thought that below him: and how can those expect the comforts of religion who will not stoop to the services of it? 3. Jerusalem flattered by the retreat of the Chaldean army from it. Jeremiah was now at liberty (*v. 4*); he *went in and out among the people*, might freely

speak to them and be spoken to by them. Jerusalem also, for the present, was at liberty, *v. 5.* Zedekiah, though a tributary to the king of Babylon, had entered into a private league with Pharaoh king of Egypt (*Ezek. xvii. 15*), pursuant to which, when the king of Babylon came to chastise him for his treachery, the king of Egypt, though he came no more in person after that great defeat which Nebuchadnezzar gave him in the reign of Jehoiakim (*2 Kings xxiv. 7*), yet sent some forces to relieve Jerusalem when it was besieged, upon notice of the approach of which the Chaldeans raised the siege, probably not for fear of them, but in policy, to fight them at a distance, before any of the Jewish forces could join them. From this they encouraged themselves to hope that Jerusalem was delivered for good and all out of the hands of its enemies and that the storm was quite blown over. Note, Sinners are commonly hardened in their security by the intermissions of judgments and the slow proceedings of them; and those who will not be awakened by the word of God may justly be lulled asleep by the providence of God. 4. Jerusalem threatened with the return of the Chaldean army and with ruin by it. Zedekiah sent to Jeremiah to desire him to pray for them, that the Chaldean army might not return; but Jeremiah sends him word back that the decree had gone forth, and that it was but a folly for them to expect peace, for God had begun a controversy with them, which he would make an end of: *Thus saith the Lord, Deceive not yourselves, v. 9.* Note, Satan himself, though he is the great deceiver, could not deceive us if we did not deceive ourselves; and thus sinners are their own destroyers by being their own deceivers, of which this is an aggravation that they are so frequently warned of it and cautioned not to deceive themselves, and they have the word of God, the great design of which is to undeceive them. Jeremiah uses no dark metaphors, but tells them plainly, (1.) That the Egyptians shall retreat, and either give back or be forced back, into *their own land* (*Ezek. xvii. 17*), which was said of old (*Isa. xxx. 7*), and is here said again, *v. 7.* The Egyptians shall help in vain; they shall not dare to face the Chaldean army, but shall retire with precipitation. Note, If God help us not, no creature can. As no power can prevail against God, so none can avail without God nor countervail his departures from us. (2.) That the Chaldeans shall return, and shall renew the siege and prosecute it with more vigour than ever: *They shall not depart for good and all (v. 9); they shall come again (v. 8); they shall fight against the city.* Note, God has the sovereign command of all the hosts of men, even of those that know him not, that own him not, and they are all made to serve his purposes. He directs their marches, their counter-marches,

their retreats, their returns, as it pleases him; and furious armies, like *stormy winds*, in all their motions are *fulfilling his word*. (3.) That Jerusalem shall certainly be delivered into the hand of the Chaldeans: *They shall take it, and burn it with fire*, v. 8. The sentence passed upon it shall be executed, and they shall be the executioners. "O but" (say they) "the Chaldeans have withdrawn; they have quitted the enterprise as impracticable." "And though they have," says the prophet, "nay, *though you had smitten their army*, so that many were slain and all the rest wounded, yet those *wounded men should rise up and burn this city*," v. 10. This is designed to denote that the doom passed upon Jerusalem is irrevocable, and its destruction inevitable; it must be laid in ruins, and these Chaldeans are the men that must destroy it, and it is now in vain to think of evading the stroke or contending with it. Note, Whatever instruments God has determined to make use of in any service for him, whether of mercy or judgment, they shall accomplish that for which they are designed, whatever incapacity or disability they may lie under or be reduced to. Those by whom God has resolved to save or to destroy, saviours they shall be and destroyers they shall be, yea, though they were all wounded; for as when God has work to do he will not want instruments to do it with, though they may seem far to seek, so when he has chosen his instruments they shall do the work, though they may seem very unlikely to accomplish it.

11 And it came to pass, that when the army of the Chaldeans was broken up from Jerusalem for fear of Pharaoh's army, 12 Then Jeremiah went forth out of Jerusalem to go into the land of Benjamin, to separate himself thence in the midst of the people. 13 And when he was in the gate of Benjamin, a captain of the ward *was* there, whose name *was* Irijah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Hananiah; and he took Jeremiah the prophet, saying, Thou fallest away to the Chaldeans. 14 Then said Jeremiah, *It is false*; I fall not away to the Chaldeans. But he hearkened not to him: so Irijah took Jeremiah, and brought him to the princes. 15 Wherefore the princes were wroth with Jeremiah, and smote him, and put him in prison in the house of Jonathan the scribe: for they had made that the prison. 16 When Jeremiah was entered into the dungeon, and into the cabins, and Jeremiah

had remained there many days; 17 Then Zedekiah the king sent, and took him out: and the king asked him secretly in his house, and said, Is there *any word from the Lord*? and Jeremiah said, There is: for, said he, thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon. 18 Moreover Jeremiah said unto king Zedekiah, What have I offended against thee, or against thy servants, or against this people, that ye have put me in prison? 19 Where *are* now your prophets which prophesied unto you, saying, The king of Babylon shall not come against you, nor against this land? 20 Therefore hear now, I pray thee, O my lord the king: let my supplication, I pray thee, be accepted before thee; that thou cause me not to return to the house of Jonathan the scribe, lest I die there. 21 Then Zedekiah the king commanded that they should commit Jeremiah into the court of the prison, and that they should give him daily a piece of bread out of the bakers' street, until all the bread in the city were spent. Thus Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison.

We have here a further account concerning Jeremiah, who relates more passages concerning himself than any other of the prophets; for the histories of the lives and sufferings of God's ministers have been very serviceable to the church, as well as their preaching and writing.

I. We are here told that Jeremiah, when he had an opportunity for it, attempted to retire out of Jerusalem into the country (v. 11, 12): *When the Chaldeans had broken up from Jerusalem because of Pharaoh's army*, upon the notice of their advancing towards them, Jeremiah determined *to go into the country*, and (as the margin reads it) *to slip away from Jerusalem in the midst of the people*, who, in that interval of the siege, went out into the country to look after their affairs there. He endeavoured to steal away in the crowd; for, though he was a man of great eminence, he could well reconcile himself to obscurity, though he was one of a thousand, he was content to be lost in the multitude and buried alive in a corner, in a cottage. Whether he designed for Anathoth or no does not appear; his concerns might call him thither, but his neighbours there were such as (unless they had mended since ch. xi. 21) might discourage him from coming among them; or he might intend



to hide himself somewhere where he was not known, and fulfil his own wish (ch. ix. 2), *Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging-place!* Jeremiah found he could do no good in Jerusalem; he laboured in vain among them, and therefore determined to leave them. Note, there are times when it is the wisdom of good men to retire into privacy, to enter into the chamber and shut the doors about them, Isa. xxvi. 20.

II. That in this attempt he was seized as a deserter and committed to prison (v. 13—15): *He was in the gate of Benjamin*, so far he had gained his point, when a captain of the ward, who probably had the charge of that gate, discovered him and took him into custody. He was the grandson of Hananiah, who, the Jews say, was Hananiah the false prophet, who contested with Jeremiah (ch. xxviii. 10), and they add that this young captain had a spite to Jeremiah upon that account. He could not arrest him without some pretence, and that which he charges upon him is, *Thou fallest away to the Chaldeans*—an unlikely story, for the Chaldeans had now gone off, Jeremiah could not reach them; or, if he could, who would go over to a baffled army? Jeremiah therefore with good reason, and with both the confidence and the mildness of an innocent man, denies the charge: *It is false; I fall not away to the Chaldeans; I am going upon my own lawful occasions.* Note, It is no new thing for the church's best friends to be represented as in the interest of her worst enemies. Thus have the blackest characters been put upon the fairest purest minds, and, in such a malicious world as this is, innocence, nay, excellency itself, is no fence against the basest calumny. When at any time we are thus falsely accused we may do as Jeremiah did, boldly deny the charge and then commit our cause to him that judges righteously. Jeremiah's protestation of his integrity, though he is a prophet, a man of God, a man of honour and sincerity, though he is a priest, and is ready to say it *in verbo sacerdotis*—on the word of a priest, is not regarded; but he is brought before the privy-council, who without examining him and the proofs against him, but upon the base malicious insinuation of the captain, fell into a passion with him: they were wroth; and what justice could be expected from men who, being in anger, would hear no reason? They beat him, without any regard had to his coat and character, and then put him in prison, in the worst prison they had, that in the house of Jonathan the scribe; either it had been his house, and he had quitted it for the inconveniences of it, but it was thought good enough for a prison, or it was now his house, and perhaps he was a rigid severe man, that made it a house of cruel bondage to his prisoners. Into this prison Jeremiah was thrust, into the dungeon, which was dark and cold, damp and dirty, the most

uncomfortable unhealthy place in it; in the cells, or cabins, there he must lodge, among which there is no choice, for they are all alike miserable lodging-places. *There Jeremiah remained many days*, and, for aught that appears, nobody came near him or enquired after him. See what a world this is. The wicked princes, who are in rebellion against God, lie at ease, lie in state in their palaces, while godly Jeremiah, who is in the service of God, lies in pain, in a loathsome dungeon. It is well that there is a world to come.

III. That Zedekiah at length sent for him, and showed him some favour; but probably not till the Chaldean army had returned and had laid fresh siege to the city. When their vain hopes, with which they fed themselves (and in confidence of which they had rensaved their servants, ch. xxxiv. 11), had all vanished, then they were in a greater confusion and consternation than ever. "O then" (says Zedekiah) "send in all haste for the prophet; let me have some talk with him." When the Chaldeans had withdrawn, he only sent to the prophet to pray for him; but now that they had again invested the city, he sent for him to consult him. Thus gracious will men be when pangs come upon them. 1. The king sent for him to give him private audience as an ambassador from God. He asked him secretly in his house, being ashamed to be seen in his company, "Is there any word from the Lord?" (v. 17)—any word of comfort? Canst thou give us any hopes that the Chaldeans shall again retire?" Note, Those that will not hearken to God's admonitions when they are in prosperity would be glad of his consolations when they are in adversity and expect that his ministers should then speak words of peace to them; but how can they expect it? What have they to do with peace? Jeremiah's life and comfort are in Zedekiah's hand, and he has now a petition to present to him for his favour, and yet, having this opportunity, he tells him plainly that *there is a word from the Lord*, but no word of comfort for him or his people: *Thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon*. If Jeremiah had consulted with flesh and blood, he would have given him a plausible answer, and, though he would not have told him a lie, yet he might have chosen whether he would tell him the worst at this time; what occasion was there for it, when he had so often told it him before? But Jeremiah was one that had obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful, and would not, to obtain mercy of man, be unfaithful either to God or to his prince; he therefore tells him the truth, the whole truth. And, since there was no remedy, it would be a kindness to the king to know his doom, that, being no surprise to him, it might be the less a terror, and he might provide to make the best of bad. Jeremiah takes this occasion to up-

braided him and his people with the credit they gave to the false prophets, who told them that the king of Babylon should not come at all, or, when he had withdrawn, should not come again against them, v. 19. "Where are now your prophets, who told you that you should have peace?" Note, Those who deceive themselves with groundless hopes of mercy will justly be upbraided with their folly when the event has undeceived them. 2. He improved this opportunity for the presenting of a private petition, as a poor prisoner, v. 18, 20. It was not in Jeremiah's power to reverse the sentence God had passed upon Zedekiah, but it was in Zedekiah's power to reverse the sentence which the princes had given against him; and therefore, since he thought him fit to be used as a prophet, he would not think him fit to be abused as the worst of malefactors. He humbly expostulates with the king: "*What have I offended against thee, or thy servants, or this people, what law have I broken, what injury have I done to the common welfare, that you have put me in prison?*" And many a one that has been very hardly dealt with has been able to make the same appeal and to make it good. He likewise earnestly begs, and very pathetically (v. 20), *Cause me not to return to yonder noisome gaol, to the house of Jonathan the scribe, lest I die there.* This was the language of innocent nature, sensible of its own grievances and solicitous for its own preservation. Though he was not at all unwilling to die God's martyr, yet, having so fair an opportunity to get relief, he would not let it slip, lest he should die his own murderer. When Jeremiah delivered God's message he spoke as one having authority, with the greatest boldness; but, when he presented his own request, he spoke as one under authority, with the greatest submissiveness: *Hear me, I pray thee, O my Lord the king! let my supplication, I pray thee, be accepted before thee.* Here is not a word of complaint of the princes that unjustly committed him, no offer to bring an action of false imprisonment against them, but all in a way of modest supplication to the king, to teach us that even when we act with the courage that becomes the faithful servants of God, yet we must conduct ourselves with the humility and modesty that become dutiful subjects to the government God hath set over us. A lion in God's cause must be a lamb in his own. And we find that God gave Jeremiah favour in the eyes of the king. (1.) He gave him his request, took care that he should not die in the dungeon, but ordered that he should have the liberty of the court of the prison, where he might have a pleasant walk and breathe a free air. (2.) He gave him more than his request, took care that he should not die for want, as many did that had their liberty, by reason of the straitness of the siege; he ordered

him his daily bread out of the public stock (for the prison was within the verge of the court), till all the bread was spent. Zedekiah ought to have released him, nay, to have preferred him, to have made him a privy-counsellor, as Joseph was taken from prison to be the second man in the kingdom. But he had not courage to do that; it was well he did as he did, and it is an instance of the care God takes of his suffering servants that are faithful to him. He can make even their confinement turn to their advantage and the court of their prison to become as green pastures to them, and raise up such friends to provide for them that *in the days of famine they shall be satisfied. At destruction and famine thou shalt laugh.*

## CHAP. XXXVIII.

In this chapter, just as in the former, we have Jeremiah greatly debased under the frowns of the princes, and yet greatly honoured by the favour of the king. They used him as a criminal; he used him as a privy-counsellor. Here, I, Jeremiah for his faithfulness is put into the dungeon by the princes, ver. 1-6. II. At the intercession of Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, by special order from the king, he is taken up out of the dungeon and confined only to the court of the prison, ver. 7-13. III. He has a private conference with the king upon the present conjuncture of affairs, ver. 14-23. IV. Care is taken to keep that conference private, ver. 24-28.

**T**HEN Shephatiah the son of Matan, and Gedaliah the son of Pashur, and Jucal the son of Shelemiah, and Pashur the son of Malchiah, heard the words that Jeremiah had spoken unto all the people, saying, 2 Thus saith the Lord, He that remaineth in this city shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth forth to the Chaldeans shall live; for he shall have his life for a prey, and shall live. 3 Thus saith the Lord, This city shall surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon's army, which shall take it. 4 Therefore the princes said unto the king, We beseech thee, let this man be put to death: for thus he weakeneth the hands of the men of war that remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, in speaking such words unto them: for this man seeketh not the welfare of this people, but the hurt. 5 Then Zedekiah the king said, Behold, he is in your hand: for the king is not he that can do any thing against you. 6 Then took they Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech, that was in the court of the prison: and they let down Jeremiah with cords. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sunk in the



mire. 7 Now when Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs which was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon; the king then sitting in the gate of Benjamin; 8 Ebed-melech went forth out of the king's house, and spake to the king, saying, 9 My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is like to die for hunger in the place where he is: for *there is* no more bread in the city. 10 Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Take from hence thirty men with thee, and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon, before he die. 11 So Ebed-melech took the men with him, and went into the house of the king under the treasury, and took thence old cast clouts and old rotten rags, and let them down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah. 12 And Ebed-melech the Ethiopian said unto Jeremiah, Put now *these* old cast clouts and rotten rags under thine armholes under the cords. And Jeremiah did so. 13 So they drew up Jeremiah with cords, and took him up out of the dungeon: and Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison.

Here, 1. Jeremiah persists in his plain preaching; what he had many a time said, he still says (v. 3): *This city shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon*; though it hold out long, it will be taken at last. Nor would he have so often repeated this unwelcome message but that he could put them in a certain way, though not to save the city, yet to save themselves; so that every man might have his own life given him for a prey if he would be advised, v. 2. Let him not stay in the city, in hopes to defend that, for it will be to no purpose, but let him *go forth to the Chaldeans*, and throw himself upon their mercy, before things come to extremity, and then *he shall live*; they will not put him to the sword, but give him quarter (*satis est prostrasse leoni—it suffices the lion to lay his antagonist prostrate*) and he shall escape *the famine and pestilence*, which will be the death of multitudes within the city. Note, Those do better for themselves who patiently submit to the rebukes of Providence than those who contend with them. And, if we cannot have our liberty, we must reckon it a mercy to have our lives,

and not foolishly throw them away upon a point of honour; they may be reserved for better times. 2. The princes persist in their malice against Jeremiah. He was faithful to his country and to his trust as a prophet, though he had suffered many a time for his faithfulness; and, though at this time he ate the king's bread, yet that did not stop his mouth. But his persecutors were still bitter against him, and complained that he abused the liberty he had of walking in the court of the prison; for, though he could not go to the temple to preach, yet he vented the same things in private conversation to those that came to visit him, and therefore (v. 4) they represented him to the king as a dangerous man, disaffected to his country and to the government he lived under: *He seeks not the welfare of this people, but the hurt*—an unjust insinuation, for no man had laid out himself more for the good of Jerusalem than he had done. They represent his preaching as having a bad tendency. The design of it was plainly to bring men to repent and turn to God, which would have been as much as any thing a strengthening to the hands both of the soldiery and of the burghers, and yet they represented it *as weakening their hands* and discouraging them; and, if it did this, it was their own fault. Note, It is common for wicked people to look upon God's faithful ministers as their enemies, only because they show them what enemies they are to themselves while they continue impenitent. 3. Jeremiah hereupon, by the king's permission, is put into a dungeon, with a view to his destruction there. Zedekiah, though he felt a conviction that Jeremiah was a prophet, sent of God, had not courage to own it, but yielded to the violence of his persecutors (v. 5): *He is in your hand*; and a worse sentence he could not have passed upon him. We found in Jehoiakim's reign that the princes were better affected to the prophet than the king was (ch. xxxvi. 25); but now they were more violent against him, a sign that they were ripening apace for ruin. Had it been in a cause that concerned his own honour or profit, he would have let them know that the king is he who can do what he pleases, whether they will or no; but in the cause of God and his prophet, which he was very cool in, he basely sneaks, and truckles to them: *The king is not he that can do any thing against you*. Note, Those will have a great deal to answer for who, though they have a secret kindness for good people, dare not own it in a time of need, nor will do what they might do to prevent mischief designed them. The princes, having this general warrant from the king, immediately put poor Jeremiah into the dungeon of Malchiah, that was in the court of the prison (v. 6), a deep dungeon, for they let him down into it with cords, and a dirty one, for *there was no water in it, but mire*; and he sunk in the mire, up to the neck, says Josephus. Those

that put him here doubtless designed that he should die here, die for hunger, die for cold, and so die miserably, die obscurely, fearing, if they should put him to death openly, the people might be affected with what he would say and be incensed against them. Many of God's faithful witnesses have thus been privately made away, and starved to death, in prisons, whose blood will be brought to account in the day of discovery. We are not here told what Jeremiah did in this distress, but he tells us himself (Lam. iii. 55, 57), *I called upon thy name, O Lord! out of the low dungeon, and thou drewest near, saying, Fear not.* 4. Application is made to the king by an honest courtier, Ebed-melech, one of the gentlemen of the bed-chamber, in behalf of the poor sufferer. Though the princes carried on the matter as privately as they could, yet it came to the ear of this good man, who probably sought opportunities to do good. It may be he came to the knowledge of it by hearing Jeremiah's moans out of the dungeon, for it was in the king's house, v. 7. Ebed-melech was an Ethiopian, a stranger to the commonwealth of Israel, and yet had in him more humanity, and more divinity too, than native Israelites had. Christ found more faith among Gentiles than among Jews. Ebed-melech lived in a wicked court and in a very corrupt degenerate age, and yet had a great sense both of equity and piety. God has his remnant in all places, among all sorts. There were saints even in Caesar's household. The king was now sitting in the gate of Benjamin, to try causes and receive appeals and petitions, or perhaps holding a council of war there. Thither Ebed-melech went immediately to him, for the case would not admit delay; the prophet might have perished if he had trifled or put it off till he had an opportunity of speaking to the king in private. No time must be lost when life is in danger, especially so valuable a life. He boldly asserts that Jeremiah had a great deal of wrong done him, and is not afraid to tell the king so, though they were princes that did it, though they were now present in court, and though they had the king's warrant for what they did. Whither should oppressed innocence flee for protection but to the throne, especially when great men are its oppressors? Ebed-melech appears truly brave in this matter. He does not mince the matter; though he had a place at court, which he would be in danger of losing for his plain dealing, yet he tells the king faithfully, let him take it as he will, *These men have done ill in all that they have done to Jeremiah.* They had dealt unjustly with him, for he had not deserved any punishment at all; and they had dealt barbarously with him, so as they used not to deal with the vilest malefactors. And they needed not to have put him to this miserable death; for, if they had let him alone where he was,

he was likely to die for hunger in the place where he was, in the court of the prison to which he was confined, for there was no more bread in the city: the stores out of which he was to have his allowance (ch. xxxvii. 21) were in a manner spent. See how God can raise up friends for his people in distress where they little thought of them, and animate men for his service even beyond expectation. 5. Orders are immediately given for his release, and Ebed-melech takes care to see them executed. The king, who but now durst do nothing against the princes, had his heart wonderfully changed on a sudden, and will now have Jeremiah released in defiance of the princes, for therefore he orders no less than thirty men, and those of the lifeguard, to be employed in fetching him out of the dungeon, lest the princes should raise a party to oppose it, v. 10. Let this encourage us to appear boldly for God—we may succeed better than we could have thought, for the hearts of kings are in the hand of God. Ebed-melech gained his point, and soon brought Jeremiah the good news; and it is observable how particularly the manner of his drawing him out of the dungeon is related (for God is not unrighteous to forget any work or labour of love which is shown to his people or ministers, no, nor any circumstance of it, Heb. vi. 10); special notice is taken of his great tenderness in providing old soft rags for Jeremiah to put under his arm-holes, to keep the cords wherewith he was to be drawn up from hurting him, his arm-holes being probably galled by the cords wherewith he was let down. Nor did he throw the rags down to him, lest they should be lost in the mire, but carefully let them down, v. 11, 12. Note, Those that are in distress should not only be relieved, but relieved with compassion and marks of respect, all which shall be placed to account and abound to a good account in the day of recompence. See what a good use even old rotten rags may be put to, which therefore should not be made waste of, any more than broken meat: even in the king's house, and under the treasury too, these were carefully preserved for the use of the poor or sick. Jeremiah is brought up out of the dungeon, and is now where he was, in the court of the prison, v. 13. Perhaps Ebed-melech could have made interest with the king to get him his discharge thence also, now that he had the king's ear; but he thought him safer and better provided for there than he would be any where else. God can, when he pleases, make a prison to become a refuge and hiding-place to his people in distress and danger.

14 Then Zedekiah the king sent, and took Jeremiah the prophet unto him into the third entry that is in the house of the Lord: and the king said unto Jeremiah, I will ask thee



a thing; hide nothing from me. 15 Then Jeremiah said unto Zedekiah, If I declare *it* unto thee, wilt thou not surely put me to death? and if I give thee counsel, wilt thou not hearken unto me? 16 So Zedekiah the king sware secretly unto Jeremiah, saying, *As the Lord liveth*, that made us this soul, I will not put thee to death, neither will I give thee into the hand of these men that seek thy life. 17 Then said Jeremiah unto Zedekiah, Thus saith the Lord, the God of hosts, the God of Israel; If thou wilt assuredly go forth unto the king of Babylon's princes, then thy soul shall live, and this city shall not be burned with fire; and thou shalt live, and thine house: 18 But if thou wilt not go forth to the king of Babylon's princes, then shall this city be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and thou shalt not escape out of their hand. 19 And Zedekiah the king said unto Jeremiah, I am afraid of the Jews that are fallen to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hand, and they mock me. 20 But Jeremiah said, They shall not deliver *thee*. Obey, I beseech thee, the voice of the Lord, which I speak unto thee: so it shall be well unto thee, and thy soul shall live. 21 But if thou refuse to go forth, this *is* the word that the Lord hath showed me: 22 And, behold, all the women that are left in the king of Judah's house *shall be* brought forth to the king of Babylon's princes, and those *women* shall say, Thy friends have set thee on, and have prevailed against thee: thy feet are sunk in the mire, *and* they are turned away back. 23 So they shall bring out all thy wives and thy children to the Chaldeans: and thou shalt not escape out of their hand, but shalt be taken by the hand of the king of Babylon: and thou shalt cause this city to be burned with fire. 24 Then said Zedekiah unto Jeremiah, Let no man know of these words, and thou shalt not die. 25 But if the princes hear that I have talked with thee, and they come unto thee, and say unto thee, Declare

unto us now what thou hast said unto the king, hide it not from us, and we will not put thee to death; also what the king said unto thee: 26 Then thou shalt say unto them, I presented my supplication before the king, that he would not cause me to return to Jonathan's house, to die there. 27 Then came all the princes unto Jeremiah, and asked him: and he told them according to all these words that the king had commanded. So they left off speaking with him; for the matter was not perceived. 28 So Jeremiah abode in the court of the prison until the day that Jerusalem was taken: and he was *there* when Jerusalem was taken.

In the foregoing chapter we had the king in close conference with Jeremiah, and here again, though (c. 5) he had given him up into the hands of his enemies; such a struggle there was in the breast of this unhappy prince between his convictions and his corruptions. Observe.

I. The honour that Zedekiah did to the prophet. When he was newly fetched out of the dungeon he sent for him to advise with him privately. He met him in the *third entry*, or (as the margin reads it) the *principal entry*, that is in, or leads towards, or adjoins to, the house of the Lord, c. 14. In appointing this place of interview with the prophet perhaps he intended to show a respect and reverence for the house of God, which was proper enough now that he was desiring to hear the word of God. Zedekiah would ask Jeremiah a thing; it should rather be rendered, a word. "I am here asking thee for a word of prediction, of counsel, of comfort, a word from the Lord, ch. xxxvii. 17. Whatever word thou hast for me *hide it not from me*; let me know the worst." He had been told plainly what things would come to in the foregoing chapter, but, like Balaam, he asks again, in hopes to get a more pleasing answer, as if God, who is in one mind, were altogether such a one as himself, who was in many minds.

II. The bargain that Jeremiah made with him before he would give him his advice, v. 15. He would stipulate, 1. For his own safety. Zedekiah would have him deal faithfully with him: "And if I do," says Jeremiah, "*wilt thou not put me to death?*" I am afraid thou wilt" (so some take it); "what else can I expect when thou art led blindfold by the princes?" Or, Wilt thou promise that thou wilt not?" Not that Jeremiah was backward to send the doctrine he preached with his blood, when he was called to do so; but, in doing our duty, we ought to use all lawful means for our own

preservation; even the apostles of Christ did so. 2. He would answer for the success of his advice, being no less concerned for Zedekiah's welfare than for his own. He is willing to give him wholesome advice, and does not upbraid him with his unkindness in suffering him to be put into the dungeon, nor bid him go and consult with his princes, whose judgments he had such a value for. Ministers must with meekness instruct even those that oppose themselves, and render good for evil. He is desirous that he should *hear counsel and receive instruction*: "*Wilt thou not hearken unto me?*" Surely thou wilt; I am in hopes to find thee pliable at last, and now in *this thy day* willing to know the things that belong to thy peace." Note, Then, and then only, there is hope of sinners, when they are willing to hearken to good counsel. Some read it as spoken despairingly: "*If I give thee counsel, thou wilt not hearken unto me*;" I have reason to fear thou wilt not, and then I might as well keep my counsel to myself." Note, Ministers have little heart to speak to those who have long and often turned a deaf ear to them. Now, as to this latter concern of Jeremiah's, Zedekiah makes him no answer, will not promise to hearken to his advice: though he desires to know what is the mind of God, yet he will reserve himself a liberty, when he does know it, to do as he thinks fit; as if it were the prerogative of a prince not to have his ruin prevented by good counsel. But, as to the prophet's safety, he promises him, upon the word of a king, and confirms his promise with an oath, that, whatever he should say to him, no advantage should be taken against him for it: *I will neither put thee to death nor deliver thee into the hands of those that will*, v. 16. This, he thought, was a mighty favour, and yet Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, when Daniel read their doom, not only protected him, but preferred and rewarded him, Dan. ii. 48; v. 29. Zedekiah's oath on this occasion is solemn, and very observable: "*As the Lord liveth, who made us this soul*, who gave me my life and thee thine, I dare not take away thy life unjustly, knowing that then I should forfeit my own to him that is the Lord of life." Note, God is the Father of spirits; souls are his workmanship, and they are more *fearfully and wonderfully made* than bodies are. The soul both of the greatest prince and of the poorest prisoner is of God's making. *He fashioneth their hearts* alike easily. In all our appeals to God, and in all our dealings both with ourselves and others, we ought to consider this, that *the living God made us these souls*.

III. The good advice that Jeremiah gave him, with good reasons why he should take it, not from any prudence or politics of his own, but in the name of the Lord, the God of hosts and God of Israel. Not as a statesman, but as a prophet, he advises him by

all means to surrender himself and his city to the king of Babylon's princes: "*Go forth to them, and make the best terms thou canst with them*," v. 17. This was the advice he had given to the people (v. 2, and before, ch. xxi. 9), to submit to divine judgments, and not think of contending with them. Note, In dealing with God, that which is good counsel to the meanest is so to the greatest, for *there is no respect of persons* with him. To persuade him to take this counsel, he sets before him good and evil, life and death. 1. If he will tamely yield, he shall save his children from the sword and Jerusalem from the flames. The white flag is yet hung out; if he will but acknowledge God's justice, he shall experience his mercy: *The city shall not be burnt, and thou shalt live and thy house*. But, 2. If he will obstinately stand it out, it will be the ruin both of his house and Jerusalem (v. 18); for when God judges he will overcome. This is the case of sinners with God; let them humbly submit to his grace and government and they shall live; let them *take hold on his strength, that they may make peace, and they shall make peace*; but, if they harden their hearts against his proposals, it will certainly be to their destruction: they must either bend or break.

IV. The objection which Zedekiah made against the prophet's advice, v. 19. Jeremiah spoke to him by prophecy, in the name of God, and therefore if he had had a due regard to the divine authority, wisdom, and goodness, as soon as he understood what the mind of God was he would immediately have acquiesced in it and resolved to observe it, without disputing; but, as if it had been the dictate only of Jeremiah's prudence, he advances against it some prudential considerations of his own: but human wisdom is folly when it contradicts the divine counsels. All he suggests is, "*I am afraid*, not of the Chaldeans; their princes are men of honour, but of the Jews, that have already gone over to the Chaldeans; when they see me follow them, who had so much opposed their going, they will laugh at me, and say, *Hast thou also become weak as water?*" Isa. xiv. 10. Now, 1. It was not at all likely that he should be thus exposed and ridiculed, that the Chaldeans should so far gratify the Jews, or trample upon him, as to deliver him into their hands; nor that the Jews, who were themselves captives, should be in such a gay humour as to make a jest of the misery of their prince. Note, We often frighten ourselves from our duty by foolish, causeless, groundless fears, that are merely the creatures of our own fancy and imagination. 2. If he should be taunted at a little by the Jews, could he not despise it and make light of it? What harm would it do him? Note, Those have very weak and fretful spirits indeed that cannot bear to be laughed at for that which is both their duty



and their interest. 3. Though it had been really the greatest personal mischief that he could imagine it to be, yet he ought to have ventured it, in obedience to God, and for the preservation of his family and city. He thought it would be looked upon as a piece of cowardice to surrender; whereas it would be really an instance of true courage cheerfully to bear a less evil, the mocking of the Jews, for the avoiding of a greater, the ruin of his family and kingdom.

V. The pressing importunity with which Jeremiah followed the advice he had given the king. He assures him that, if he would comply with the will of God herein, the thing he feared should not come upon him (v. 20): *They shall not deliver thee up*, but treat thee as becomes thy character. He begs of him, after all the foolish games he had played, to manage wisely the last stake, and now at length to do well for himself: *Obey, I beseech thee, the voice of the Lord*, because it is his voice, so it *shall be well unto thee*. But he tells him what would be the consequence if he would not obey. 1. He himself would *fall into the hands of the Chaldeans*, as implacable enemies, whom he might now make his friends by throwing himself into their hands. If he must fall, he should contrive how to fall easily: "*Thou shalt not escape*, as thou hopest to do," v. 23. 2. He would himself be chargeable with the destruction of Jerusalem, which he pretended a concern for the preservation of: "*Thou shalt cause this city to be burnt with fire*, for by a little submission and self-denial thou mightest have prevented it." Thus subjects often suffer for the pride and wilfulness of their rulers, who should be their protectors, but prove their destroyers. 3. Whereas he causelessly feared an unjust reproach for surrendering, he should certainly fall under a just reproach for standing it out, and that from women too, v. 22. The court ladies who were left when Jehoiakim and Jeconiah were carried away will now at length fall into the hands of the enemy, and they shall say, "*The men of thy peace*, whom thou didst consult with and confide in, and who promised thee peace if thou wouldst be ruled by them, have *set thee on*, have encouraged thee to be bold and brave and hold out to the last extremity; and see what comes of it? They, by prevailing upon thee, have *prevailed against thee*, and thou findest those thy real enemies that would be thought thy only friends. *Now thy feet are sunk in the mire*, thou art embarrassed, and hast no way to help thyself; thy feet cannot get forward, but are *turned away back*." Thus will Zedekiah be bantered by the women, when all his wives and children shall be made a prey to the conquerors, v. 23. Note, What we seek to avoid by sin will be justly brought upon us by the righteousness of God. And those that decline the way of duty for fear of reproach will

certainly meet with much greater reproach in the way of disobedience. *The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him*, Prov. x. 24.

VI. The care which Zedekiah took to keep this conference private (v. 24): *Let no man know of these words*. He does not at all incline to take God's counsel, nor so much as promise to consider of it; for so obstinate has he been to the calls of God, and so wilful in the ways of sin, that though he has good counsel given him he seems to be given up to walk in his own counsels. He has nothing to object against Jeremiah's advice, and yet he will not follow it. Many hear God's words, but will not do them. 1. Jeremiah is charged to let no man know of what had passed between the king and him. Zedekiah is concerned to keep it private, not so much for Jeremiah's safety (for he knew the princes could do him no hurt without his permission), but for his own reputation. Note, Many have really a better affection to good men and good things than they are willing to own. God's prophets are manifest in their consciences (2 Cor. v. 11), but they care not for manifesting that to the world; they would rather do them a kindness than have it known that they do: such, it is to be feared, *love the praise of men more than the praise of God*. 2. He is instructed what to say to the princes if they should examine him about it. He must tell them that he was petitioning the king not to renege him back to the house of Jonathan the scribe (v. 25, 26), and he did tell them so (v. 27), and no doubt it was true: he would not let slip so fair an opportunity of engaging the king's favour; so that this was no lie or equivocation, but a part of the truth, which it was lawful for him to put them off with when he was under no obligation at all to tell them the whole truth. Note, Though we must be harmless as doves, so as never to tell a wilful lie, yet we must be wise as serpents, so as not needlessly to expose ourselves to danger by telling all we know.

## CHAP. XXXIX.

As the prophet Isaiah, after he had largely foretold the deliverance of Jerusalem out of the hands of the king of Assyria, gave a particular narrative of the story, that it might appear how exactly the event answered to the prediction, so the prophet Jeremiah, after he had largely foretold the delivering of Jerusalem into the hands of the king of Babylon, gives a particular account of that end event for the same reason. That melancholy story we have in this chapter, which serves to disprove the false flattering prophets and to confirm the word of God's messengers. We are here told, I. That Jerusalem, after eighteen months' siege, was taken by the Chaldean army, ver. 1-3. II. That king Zedekiah, attempting to make his escape, was seized and made a miserable captive to the king of Babylon, ver. 4-7. III. That Jerusalem was burnt to the ground, and the people were carried captive, except the poor, ver. 8-10. IV. That the Chaldeans were very kind to Jeremiah, and to a particular care of him, ver. 11-14. V. That Zedekiah too, for his kindness, had a protection from God himself in the day of desolation, ver. 15-18.

**I**N the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, came Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon and all his army against Jerusalem, and they besieged it. 2 And in the eleventh

year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, the ninth day of the month, the city was broken up. 3 And all the princes of the king of Babylon came in, and sat in the middle gate, *even* Nergal-sharezer, Samgar-nebo, Sarsechim, Rab-saris, Nergal-sharezer, Rab-mag, with all the residue of the princes of the king of Babylon. 4 And it came to pass, *that* when Zedekiah the king of Judah saw them, and all the men of war, then they fled, and went forth out of the city by night, by the way of the king's garden, by the gate betwixt the two walls: and he went out the way of the plain. 5 But the Chaldeans' army pursued after them, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho: and when they had taken him, they brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon to Riblah in the land of Hamath, where he gave judgment upon him. 6 Then the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah in Riblah before his eyes: also the king of Babylon slew all the nobles of Judah. 7 Moreover he put out Zedekiah's eyes, and bound him with chains, to carry him to Babylon. 8 And the Chaldeans burned the king's house, and the houses of the people, with fire, and brake down the walls of Jerusalem. 9 Then Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard carried away captive into Babylon the remnant of the people that remained in the city, and those that fell away, that fell to him, with the rest of the people that remained. 10 But Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard left of the poor of the people, which had nothing, in the land of Judah, and gave them vineyards and fields at the same time.

We were told, in the close of the foregoing chapter, that *Jeremiah abode patiently in the court of the prison, until the day that Jerusalem was taken*. He gave the princes no further disturbance by his prophesying, nor they him by their persecutions; for he had no more to say than what he had said, and, the siege being carried on briskly, God found them other work to do. See here what it came to.

I. The city is at length taken by storm; for how could it hold out when God himself fought against it? Nebuchadnezzar's army sat down before it in the *ninth* year of Zede-

kiah, *in the tenth month* (v. 1), in the depth of winter. Nebuchadnezzar himself soon after retired to take his pleasure, and left his generals to carry on the siege: they intermitted it awhile, but soon renewed it with redoubled force and vigour. At length, *in the eleventh year, in the fourth month*, about midsummer, they entered the city, the soldiers being so weakened by famine, and all their provisions being now spent, that they were not able to make any resistance, v. 2. Jerusalem was so strong a place that nobody would have believed the enemy could ever enter its gates, Lam. iv. 12. But sin had provoked God to withdraw his protection, and then, like Samson when his hair was cut, it was weak as other cities.

II. The princes of the king of Babylon take possession of the *middle gate*, v. 3. Some think that this was the same with that which is called the *second gate* (Zeph. i. 10), which is supposed to be in the middle wall that divided between one part of the city and the other. Here they cautiously made a halt, and durst not go forward into so large a city, among men that perhaps would sell their lives as dearly as they could, until they had given directions for the searching of all places, that they might not be surprised by any ambush. They sat in the *middle gate*, thence to take a view of the city and give orders. The princes are here named, rough and uncouth names they are, to intimate what a sad change sin had made; there, where *Eliakim* and *Hilkiah*, who bore the name of the God of Israel, used to sit, now sit *Nergal-sharezer*, and *Samgar-nebo*, &c., who bore the names of the heathen gods. *Rab-saris* and *Rab-mag* are supposed to be not the names of distinct persons, but the titles of those whose names go before. *Sarsechim* was *Rab-saris*, that is, *captain of the guard*; and *Nergal-sharezer*, to distinguish him from the other of the same name that is put first, is called *Rab-mag*—*camp-master*, either muster-master or quarter-master. these and the other great generals sat in the gate. And now was fulfilled what Jeremiah prophesied long since (ch. i. 15), that the families of the kingdoms of the north should set every one his throne at the entering of the gates of Jerusalem. Justly do the princes of the heathen set up themselves there, where the gods of the heathen had been so often set up.

III. Zedekiah, having in disguise perhaps seen the princes of the king of Babylon take possession of one of the gates of the city, thought it high time to shift for his own safety, and, loaded with guilt and fear, he *went out of the city*, under no other protection but that of *the night* (v. 4), which soon failed him, for he was discovered, pursued, and overtaken. Though he made the best of his way, he could make nothing of it, could not get forward, but *in the plains of Jericho* fell into the hands of the pursuers,



v. 5. Thence he was brought prisoner to Riblah, where the king of Babylon passed sentence upon him as a rebel, not sentence of death, but, one may almost say, a worse thing. For, 1. He *slew his sons before his eyes*, and they must all be little; some of them infants, for Zedekiah himself was now but thirty-two years of age. The death of these sweet babes must needs be so many deaths to himself, especially when he considered that his own obstinacy was the cause of it, for he was particularly told of this thing: *They shall bring forth thy wives and children to the Chaldeans*, ch. xxxviii. 23. 2. He *slew all the nobles of Judah* (v. 6), probably not those princes of Jerusalem who had advised him to this desperate course (it would be a satisfaction to him to see them cut off), but the great men of the country, who were innocent of the matter. 3. He ordered *Zedekiah to have his eyes put out* (v. 7), so condemning him to darkness for life who had shut his eyes against the clear light of God's word, and was of those princes who *will not understand, but walk on in darkness*, Ps. lxxxii. 5. 4. He *bound him with two brazen chains or fetters* (so the margin reads it), to carry him away to Babylon, there to spend the rest of his days in misery. All this sad story we had before, 2 Kings xxv. 4, &c.

IV. Some time afterwards the city was burnt, temple and palace and all, and the wall of it broken down, v. 8. "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! this comes of killing the prophets, and stoning those that were sent to thee. O Zedekiah, Zedekiah! this thou mightest have prevented if thou wouldst but have taken God's counsel, and yielded in time.*"

V. The people that were left were all *carried away captives to Babylon*, v. 9. Now they must bid a final farewell to the land of their nativity, that pleasant land, and to all their possessions and enjoyments in it, must be driven some hundreds of miles, like beasts, before the conquerors, that were now their cruel masters, must lie at their mercy in a strange land, and be servants to those who would be sure to rule them with rigour. The word *tyrant* is originally a Chaldee word, and is often used for *lords* by the Chaldee paraphrast, as if the Chaldeans, when they were lords, tyrannized more than any other: we have reason to think that the poor Jews had reason to say so. Some few were left behind, but they were *the poor of the people*, that had nothing to lose, and therefore never made any resistance. And they not only had their liberty, and were left to tarry at home, but the *captain of the guard gave them vineyards and fields at the same time*, such as they were never masters of before, v. 10. Observe here, 1. The wonderful changes of Providence. Some are abased, others advanced, 1 Sam. ii. 5. *The hungry are filled with good things, and the rich sent empty away.* The ruin of some proves the rise of others. Let us therefore

in our abundance *rejoice as though we rejoiced not*, and in our distresses *weep as though we wept not*. 2. The just retributions of Providence. The rich had been proud oppressors, and now they were justly punished for their injustice; the poor had been patient sufferers, and now they were graciously rewarded for their patience and amends made them for all their losses; for *verily there is a God that judges in the earth*, even in this world, much more in the other.

11 Now Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon gave charge concerning Jeremiah to Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard, saying, 12 Take him, and look well to him, and do him no harm; but do unto him even as he shall say unto thee. 13 So Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard sent, and Nebushasban, Rab-saris, and Nergal-sharezzer, Rab-mag, and all the king of Babylon's princes; 14 Even they sent, and took Jeremiah out of the court of the prison, and committed him unto Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan, that he should carry him home: so he dwelt among the people. 15 Now the word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah, while he was shut up in the court of the prison, saying, 16 Go and speak to Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring my words upon this city for evil, and not for good; and they shall be *accomplished* in that day before thee. 17 But I will deliver thee in that day, saith the Lord: and thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men of whom thou art afraid. 18 For I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the sword, but thy life shall be for a prey unto thee: because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the Lord.

Here we must sing of mercy, as in the former part of the chapter we sang of judgment, and must sing unto God of both. We may observe here,

1. A gracious providence concerning Jeremiah. When Jerusalem was laid in ruins, and all men's hearts failed them for fear, then might he lift up his head with comfort, knowing that his redemption drew nigh, as Christ's followers when the second destruction of Jerusalem was hastening on, Luke xxi. 28. Nebuchadnezzar had given particular orders that care should be taken of him, and that he should be in all respects well used, v. 11,

12. Nebuzar-adan and the rest of the king of Babylon's princes observed these orders, discharged him out of prison, and did every thing to make him easy, *v.* 13, 14. Now we may look upon this, 1. As a very generous act of Nebuchadnezzar, who, though he was a haughty potentate, yet took cognizance of this poor prophet. Doubtless he had received information concerning him from the deserters, that he had foretold the king of Babylon's successes against Judah and other countries, that he had pressed his prince and people to submit to him, and that he had suffered very hard things for so doing; and in consideration of all this (though perhaps he might have heard also that he had foretold the destruction of Babylon at length) he gave him these extraordinary marks of his favour. Note, It is the character of a great soul to take notice of the services and sufferings of the meanest. It was honourably done of the king to give this charge even before the city was taken, and of the captains to observe it even in the heat of action, and it is recorded for imitation. 2. As a reproach to Zedekiah and the princes of Israel. They put him in prison, and the king of Babylon and his princes took him out. God's people and ministers have often found fairer and kinder usage among strangers and infidels than among those that call themselves of the holy city. Paul found more favour and justice with king Agrippa than with Ananias the high priest. 3. As the performance of God's promise to Jeremiah, in recompence for his services. *I will cause the enemy to treat thee well in the day of evil, ch. xv. 11.* Jeremiah had been faithful to his trust as a prophet, and now God approves himself faithful to him and the promise he had made him. Now he is comforted according to the time wherein he had been afflicted, and sees thousands fall on each hand and himself safe. The false prophets fell by those judgments which they said should never come (*ch. xiv. 15*), which made their misery the more terrible to them. The true prophet escaped those judgments which he said would come, and that made his escape the more comfortable to him. The same that were the instruments of punishing the persecutors were the instruments of relieving the persecuted; and Jeremiah thought never the worse of his deliverance for its coming by the hand of the king of Babylon, but saw the more of the hand of God in it. A fuller account of this matter we shall meet with in the next chapter.

II. A gracious message to Ebed-melech, to assure him of a recompence for his kindness to Jeremiah. This message was sent to him by Jeremiah himself, who, when he returned him thanks for his kindness to him, thus turned him over to God to be his paymaster. He relieved *a prophet in the name of a prophet*, and thus he had *a prophet's reward*. This message was delivered

to him immediately after he had done that kindness to Jeremiah, but it is mentioned here after the taking of the city, to show that, as God was kind to Jeremiah at that time, so he was to Ebed-melech for his sake; and it was a token of special favour to both, and they ought so to account it, that they were not involved in any of the common calamities. Jeremiah is directed to tell him, 1. That God would certainly bring upon Jerusalem the ruin that had been long and often threatened; and, for his further satisfaction in having been kind to Jeremiah, he should see him abundantly proved a true prophet, *v.* 16. 2. That God took notice of the fear he had of the judgments coming. Though he was bravely bold in the service of God, yet he was afraid of the rod of God. The enemies were *men of whom he was afraid*. Note, God knows how to adapt and accommodate his comforts to the fears and griefs of his people, for he *knows their souls in adversity*. 3. That he shall be delivered from having a share in the common calamity: *I will deliver thee; I will surely deliver thee*. He had been instrumental to deliver God's prophet out of the dungeon, and now God promises to deliver him; for he will be behind-hand with none for any service they do, directly or indirectly, for his name: "Thou hast saved Jeremiah's life, that was precious to thee, and therefore *thy life shall be given thee for a prey*." 4. The reason given for this distinguishing favour which God had in store for him is *because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the Lord*. God, in recompensing men's services, has an eye to the principle they go upon in those services, and rewards according to those principles; and there is no principle of obedience that will be more acceptable to God, nor have a greater influence upon us, than a believing confidence in God. Ebed-melech trusted in God that he would own him, and stand by him, and then he was not afraid of the face of man. And those who trust God, as this good man did, in the way of duty, will find that their hope shall not make them ashamed in times of the greatest danger.

#### CHAP. XL.

We have attended Jerusalem's funeral pile, and have taken our leave of the captives that were carried to Babylon, not expecting to hear any more of them in this book: perhaps we may in Ezekiel; and we must in this and the four following chapters observe the story of those few Jews that were left to remain in the land after their brethren were carried away, and it is a very melancholy story; for, though at first there were some hopeful prospects of their well-doing, they soon appeared as obstinate in sin as ever, unhumiliated and unreformed, till, all the rest of the judgments threatened in *Deut. xxviii.* being brought upon them, that which in the last verse of that dreadful chapter completes the threatenings was accomplished, "The Lord shall bring thee into Egypt again." In this chapter we have, I. A more particular account of Jeremiah's discharge and his settlement with Gedaliah, *ver. 1-6.* II. The great resort of the Jews that remained scattered in the neighbouring countries to Gedaliah, who was made their governor under the king of Babylon; and the good posture they were in for a while under him, *ver. 7-12.* III. A treacherous design formed against Gedaliah, by Ishmael, which we shall find executed in the next chapter, *ver. 13-16.*

**T**HE word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, after that Nebu-



zar-adan the captain of the guard had let him go from Ramah, when he had taken him being bound in chains among all that were carried away captive of Jerusalem and Judah, which were carried away captive unto Babylon. 2 And the captain of the guard took Jeremiah, and said unto him, The Lord thy God hath pronounced this evil upon this place. 3 Now the Lord hath brought *it*, and done according as he hath said: because ye have sinned against the Lord, and have not obeyed his voice, therefore this thing is come upon you. 4 And now, behold, I loose thee this day from the chains which *were* upon thine hand. If it seem good unto thee to come with me into Babylon, come; and I will look well unto thee: but if it seem ill unto thee to come with me into Babylon, forbear: behold, all the land *is* before thee: whither it seemeth good and convenient for thee to go, thither go. 5 Now while he was not yet gone back, *he said*, Go back also to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon hath made governor over the cities of Judah, and dwell with him among the people: or go wheresoever it seemeth convenient unto thee to go. So the captain of the guard gave him victuals and a reward, and let him go. 6 Then went Jeremiah unto Gedaliah the son of Ahikam to Mizpah; and dwelt with him among the people that were left in the land.

The title of this part of the book, which begins the chapter, seems misapplied (*The word which came to Jeremiah*), for here is nothing of prophecy in this chapter, but it is to be referred to *ch. xlii. 7*, where we have a message that God sent by Jeremiah to the captains and the people that remained. The story between is only to introduce that prophecy and show the occasion of it, that it may be the better understood, and Jeremiah, being himself concerned in the story, was the better able to give an account of it.

In these verses we have Jeremiah's adhering, by the advice of Nebuzar-adan, to Gedaliah. It should seem that Jeremiah was very honourably fetched out of the court of the prison by the king of Babylon's princes (*ch. xxxix. 13, 14*), but afterwards, being found among the people in the city, when orders were given to

the inferior officers to bind all they found that were of any fashion, in order to their being carried captives to Babylon, he, through ignorance and mistake, was bound among the rest and hurried away. Poor man! he seems to have been born to hardship and abuse—a man of sorrows indeed! But when the captives were brought manacled to Ramah, not far off, where a council of war, or court-martial, was held for giving orders concerning them, Jeremiah was soon distinguished from the rest, and, by special order of the court, was discharged. 1. The captain of the guard solemnly owns him to be a true prophet (*v. 2, 3*): "*The Lord thy God, whose messenger thou hast been and in whose name thou hast spoken, has by thee pronounced this evil upon this place; they had fair warning given them of it, but they would not take the warning, and now the Lord hath brought it, and, as by thy mouth he said it, so by my hand he hath done what he said.*" He seems thus to justify what he had done, and to glory in it, that he had been God's instrument to fulfil that which Jeremiah had been his messenger to foretel; and upon that account it was indeed the most glorious action he had ever done. He tells all the people that were now in chains before him, *It is because you have sinned against the Lord that this thing has come upon you.* The princes of Israel would never be brought to acknowledge this, though it was as evident as if it had been written with a sun-beam; but this heathen prince plainly sees it, that a people that had been so favoured as they had been by the divine goodness would never have been abandoned thus had they not been very provoking. The people of Israel had been often told this from the pulpit by their prophets, and they would not regard it; now they are told it from the bench by their conqueror, whom they dare not contradict and who will make them regard it. Note, Sooner or later men shall be made sensible that their sin is the cause of all their miseries. 2. He gives him free leave to dispose of himself as he thought fit. *He loosed him from his chains* a second time (*v. 4*), invited him to come along with him to Babylon, not as a captive, but as a friend, as a companion; and *I will set my eye upon thee* (so the word is), not only, "*I will look well to thee,*" but "*I will show thee respect, will countenance thee, and will see that thou be safe and well provided for.*" If he was not disposed to go to Babylon, he might dwell where he pleased in his own country, for it was all now at the disposal of the conquerors. He may go to Anathoth if he please, and enjoy the field he has purchased there. A great change with this good man! He that but lately was tossed from one prison to another may now walk at liberty from one possession to another. 3. He advises him to go to Gedaliah and settle with him. This Ge-

daliah, *made governor of the land under the king of Babylon*, was an honest Jew, who (it is probable) betimes went over with his friends to the Chaldeans, and approved himself so well that he had this great trust put into his hands, *v. 5*. While Jeremiah had *not yet gone back*, but stood considering what he should do, Nebuzar-adan, perceiving him neither inclined to go to Babylon nor determined whither to go, turned the scale for him, and bade him by all means *go to Gedaliah*. Sudden thoughts sometimes prove wise ones. But when he gave this counsel he did not design to bind him by it, nor will he take it ill if he do not follow it: *Go wheresoever it seemeth convenient unto thee*. It is friendly in such cases to give advice, but unfriendly to prescribe and to be angry if our advice be not taken. Let Jeremiah steer what course he pleases, Nebuzar-adan will agree to it, and believe he does for the best. Nor does he only give him his liberty, and an approbation of the measures he shall take, but provides for his support: *He gave him victuals and a present, either in clothes or money, and so let him go*. See how considerate the captain of the guard was in his kindness to Jeremiah. He set him at liberty, but it was in a country that was laid waste, and in which, as the posture of it now was, he might have perished, though it was his own country, if he had not been thus kindly furnished with necessities. Jeremiah not only accepted his kindness, but took his advice, and went to Gedaliah, to Mizpah, *and dwelt with him, v. 6*. Whether we may here commend his prudence I know not; the event does not commend it, for it did not prove at all to his comfort. However, we may commend his pious affection to the land of Israel, that unless he were forced out of it, as Ezekiel, and Daniel, and other good men were, he would not forsake it, but chose rather to dwell with the poor in the holy land than with princes in an unholy one.

7 Now when all the captains of the forces which *were* in the fields, *even* they and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam governor in the land, and had committed unto him men, and women, and children, and of the poor of the land, of them that were not carried away captive to Babylon; 8 Then they came to Gedaliah to Mizpah, even Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and Johanan and Jonathan the sons of Kareah, and Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth, and the sons of Ephai the Netophianite, and Jezaniah the son of a Maachathite, they and their men. 9 And Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan sware

unto them and to their men, saying, Fear not to serve the Chaldeans. dwell in the land, and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall be well with you. 10 As for me, behold, I will dwell at Mizpah, to serve the Chaldeans, which will come unto us: but ye, gather ye wine, and summer fruits, and oil, and put *them* in your vessels, and dwell in your cities that ye have taken. 11 Likewise when all the Jews that *were* in Moab, and among the Ammonites, and in Edom, and that *were* in all the countries, heard that the king of Babylon had left a remnant of Judah, and that he had set over them Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan; 12 Even all the Jews returned out of all places whither they were driven, and came to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah, unto Mizpah, and gathered wine and summer fruits very much. 13 Moreover Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces that *were* in the fields, came to Gedaliah to Mizpah, 14 And said unto him, Dost thou certainly know that Baalis the king of the Ammonites hath sent Ishmael the son of Nethaniah to slay thee? But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam believed them not. 15 Then Johanan the son of Kareah spake to Gedaliah in Mizpah secretly, saying, Let me go, I pray thee, and I will slay Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and no man shall know *it*: wherefore should he slay thee, that all the Jews which are gathered unto thee should be scattered, and the remnant in Judah perish? 16 But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam said unto Johanan the son of Kareah, Thou shalt not do this thing: for thou speakest falsely of Ishmael.

We have in these verses,

I. A bright sky opening upon the remnant of the Jews that were left in their own land, and a comfortable prospect given them or some peace and quietness after the many years of trouble and terror with which they had been afflicted. Jeremiah indeed had never in his prophecies spoken of any such good days reserved for the Jews immediately after the captivity; but Providence seemed to raise and encourage such an expectation, and it would be to that miserable people as life from the dead. Observe the particulars.



1. Gedaliah, one of themselves, is made *governor in the land, by the king of Babylon, v. 7.* To show that he designed to make and keep them easy he did not give this commission to one of the princes of Babylon, but to one of their brethren, who, they might be sure, would seek their peace. He was *the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan*, one of the princes. We read of his father (*ch. xxvi. 24*) that he took Jeremiah's part against the people. He seems to have been a man of great wisdom and a mild temper, and under whose government the few that were left might have been very happy. The king of Babylon had a good opinion of him and reposed a confidence in him, *for to him he committed all that were left behind.*

2. There is great resort to him from all parts, and all those that were now the Jews of the dispersion came and put themselves under his government and protection. (1.) The great men that had escaped the Chaldeans by force came and quietly submitted to Gedaliah, for their own safety and common preservation. Several are here named, *v. 8. They came with their men, their servants, their soldiers, and so strengthened one another; and the king of Babylon had such a good opinion of Gedaliah his delegate that he was not at all jealous of the increase of their numbers, but rather pleased with it.* (2.) The poor men that had escaped by flight into the neighbouring countries of Moab, Ammon, and Edom, were induced by the love they bore to their own land to return to it again as soon as they heard that Gedaliah was in authority there, *v. 11, 12.* Canaan itself would be an unsafe unpleasant country if there were no government nor governors there, and those that loved it dearly would not come back to it till they heard there were. It would be a great reviving to those that were dispersed to come together again, to those that were dispersed into foreign countries to come together in their own country, to those that were under strange kings to be under a governor of their own nation. See here in wrath God remembered mercy, and yet admitted some of them upon a further trial of their obedience.

3. The model of this new government is drawn up and settled by an original contract, which Gedaliah confirmed with an oath, a solemn oath (*v. 9*): *He swore to them and to their men, it is probable according to the warrant and instructions he had received from the king of Babylon, who empowered him to give them these assurances.* (1.) They must own the property of their lands to be in the Chaldeans. "Come" (says Gedaliah), "*fear not to serve the Chaldeans.* Fear not the sin of it." Though the divine law had forbidden them to make leagues with the heathen, yet the divine sentence had obliged them to yield to the king of Babylon. "Fear not the reproach of it, and the disparagement it will be to your nation; it is what God

has brought you to, has bound you to, and it is no disgrace to any to comply with him. Fear not the consequences of it, as if it would certainly make you and yours miserable; no, you will find the king of Babylon not so hard a landlord as you apprehend him to be; if you will but live peaceably, peaceably you shall live; disturb not the government, and it will not disturb you. *Serve the king of Babylon and it shall be well with you.*" If they should make any difficulty of doing personal homage, or should be apprehensive of danger when the Chaldeans should come among them, Gedaliah, probably by instruction from the king of Babylon, undertakes upon all occasions to act for them, and make their application acceptable to the king (*v. 10*): "*As for me, behold, I will dwell at Mizpah, to serve the Chaldeans, to do homage to them in the name of the whole body if there be occasion, to receive orders, and to pay them their tribute when they come to us.*" All that passes between them and the Chaldeans shall pass through his hand; and, if the Chaldeans put such a confidence in him, surely his own countrymen may venture to do it. Gedaliah is willing thus to give them the assurance of an oath that he will do his part in protecting them, but, being apt to err (as many good men are) on the charitable side, he did not require an oath from them that they would be faithful to him, else the following mischief might have been prevented. However, protection draws allegiance though it be not sworn, and by joining in with Gedaliah they did, in effect, consent to the terms of government, that they should *serve the king of Babylon.* But, (2.) Though they own the property of their lands to be in the Chaldeans, yet, upon that condition, they shall have the free enjoyment of them and all the profits of them (*v. 10*): "*Gather you wine and summer fruits, and take them for your own use; put them in your vessels, to be laid up for winter-store, as those do that live in a land of peace and hope to eat the labour of your hand, nay, the labour of other people's hands, for you reap what they sowed.*" Or perhaps they were the spontaneous products of that fertile soil, for which none had laboured. And accordingly we find (*v. 12*) that they *gathered wine and summer fruits very much*, such as were at present upon the ground, for their corn-harvest was over some time before Jerusalem was taken. While Gedaliah was in care for the public safety he left them to enjoy the advantages of the public plenty, and, for aught that appears, demanded no tribute from them; for he sought not his own profit, but the profit of many.

11. Here is a dark cloud gathering over this infant state, and threatening a dreadful storm. How soon is this hopeful prospect blasted! For when God begins in judgment he will make an end. It is here intimated to us, 1. That *Beals the king of*

the Ammonites had a particular spite at Gedaliah, and was contriving to take him off, either out of malice to the nation of the Jews, whose welfare he hated the thought of, or a personal pique against Gedaliah, v. 14. Some make Baalis to signify the queen-mother of the king of the Ammonites, or queen-dowager, as if she were the first mover of this bloody and treacherous design. One would have thought this little remnant might be safe when the great king of Babylon protected it; and yet it is ruined by the artifices of this petty prince or princess. Happy are those that have the King of kings on their side, who can take the wise in their own craftiness; for the greatest earthly king cannot with all his power secure us against fraud and treachery. 2. That he employed Ishmael, the son of Nethaniah, as the instrument of his malice, instigated him to murder Gedaliah, and, that he might have a fair opportunity to do it, directed him to go and enrol himself among his subjects and promise him fealty. Nothing could be more barbarous than the design itself, nor more base than the method of compassing it. How wretchedly is human nature corrupted and degenerated (even in those that pretend to the best blood) when it is capable of admitting the thought of such abominable wickedness! Ishmael was of the seed royal, and would therefore be easily tempted to envy and hate one that set up for a governor in Judah, who was not, as he was, of David's line, though he had ever so much of David's spirit. 3. That Johanan, a brisk and active man, having got scent of this plot, informed Gedaliah of it, yet taking it for granted he could not but know of it before, the proofs of the matter being so very plain: *Dost thou certainly know?* surely thou dost, v. 14. He gave him private intelligence of it (v. 15), hoping he would then take the more notice of it. He proffered his service to prevent it, by taking off Ishmael, whose very name was ominous to all the seed of Isaac: *I will slay him. Wherefore should he slay thee?* Herein he showed more courage and zeal than sense of justice; for, if it be lawful to kill for prevention, who then can be safe, since malice always suspects the worst? 4. That Gedaliah, being a man of sincerity himself, would by no means give credit to the information given him of Ishmael's treachery. He said, *Thou speakest falsely of Ishmael.* Herein he discovered more good humour than discretion, more of the innocency of the dove than the wisdom of the serpent. Princes become uneasy to themselves and all about them when they are jealous. Queen Elizabeth said that she would believe no more evil of her people than a mother would believe of her own children; yet many have been ruined by being over-confident of the fidelity of those about them.

## CHAP. XLI.

It is a very tragical story that is related in this chapter, and sheweth

that evil pursues sinners. The black cloud that was gathering in the foregoing chapter here bursts in a dreadful storm. Those few Jews that escaped the captivity were proud to think that they were still in their own land, when their brethren had gone they knew not whither, were fond of the wine and summer-fruits they had gathered, and were very secure under Gedaliah's protectorship, when, on a sudden, even these remaina prove ruins too. 1. Gedaliah is barbarously slain by Ishmael, ver. 1, 2. II. All the Jews that were with him were slain likewise (ver. 3) and a pit filled with their dead bodies, ver. 9. III. Some devout men, to the number of fourscore, that were going towards Jerusalem, were drawn in by Ishmael, and murdered likewise, ver. 4—7. Only ten of them escaped, ver. 8. IV. Those that escaped the sword were taken prisoners by Ishmael, and carried off towards the country of the Ammonites, ver. 10. V. By the conduct and courage of Johanan, though the death of the slain is not revenged, yet the prisoners are recovered, and he now becomes their commander-in-chief, ver. 11—16. VI. His project is to carry them into the land of Egypt (ver. 17, 18), which we shall hear more of in the next chapter.

NOW it came to pass in the seventh month, that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah the son of Elishama, of the seed royal, and the princes of the king, even ten men with him, came unto Gedaliah the son of Ahikam to Mizpah; and there they did eat bread together in Mizpah. 2 Then arose Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and the ten men that were with him, and smote Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan with the sword, and slew him, whom the king of Babylon had made governor over the land. 3 Ishmael also slew all the Jews that were with him, even with Gedaliah, at Mizpah, and the Chaldeans that were found there, and the men of war. 4 And it came to pass the second day after he had slain Gedaliah, and no man knew it, 5 That there came certain from Shechem, from Shiloh, and from Samaria, even fourscore men, having their beards shaven, and their clothes rent, and having cut themselves, with offerings and incense in their hand, to bring them to the house of the LORD. 6 And Ishmael the son of Nethaniah went forth from Mizpah to meet them, weeping all along as he went: and it came to pass, as he met them, he said unto them, Come to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam. 7 And it was so, when they came into the midst of the city, that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah slew them, and cast them into the midst of the pit, he, and the men that were with him. 8 But ten men were found among them that said unto Ishmael, Slay us not: for we have treasures in the field, of wheat, and of barley, and of oil, and of honey. So he forbore,



and slew them not among their brethren. 9 Now the pit wherein Ishmael had cast all the dead bodies of the men, whom he had slain because of Gedaliah, *was* it which Asa the king had made for fear of Baasha king of Israel: *and* Ishmael the son of Nethaniah filled it with *them that were* slain. 10 Then Ishmael carried away captive all the residue of the people that *were* in Mizpah, *even* the king's daughters, and all the people that remained in Mizpah, whom Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had committed to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam: and Ishmael the son of Nethaniah carried them away captive, and departed to go over to the Ammonites.

It is hard to say which is more astonishing, God's permitting or men's perpetrating such villainies as here we find committed. Such base, barbarous, bloody work is here done by men who by their birth should have been men of honour, by their religion just men, and this done upon those of their own nature, their own nation, their own religion, and now their brethren in affliction, when they were all brought under the power of the victorious Chaldeans, and smarting under the judgments of God, upon no provocation, nor with any prospect of advantage—all done, not only in cold blood, but with art and management. We have scarcely such an instance of perfidious cruelty in all the scripture; so that with John, when he saw *the woman drunk with the blood of the saints*, we may well wonder with great admiration. But God permitted it for the completing of the ruin of an unhumiliated people, and the filling up of the measure of their judgments, who had filled up the measure of their iniquities. Let it inspire us with an indignation at the wickedness of men and an awe of God's righteousness.

I. Ishmael and his party treacherously killed Gedaliah himself in the first place. Though the king of Babylon had made him a great man, had given him a commission to be *governor of the land* which he had conquered, though God had made him a good man and a great blessing to his country, and his agency for its welfare was as life from the dead, yet neither could secure him. Ishmael was of *the seed royal* (v. 1) and therefore jealous of Gedaliah's growing greatness, and enraged that he should merit and accept a commission under the king of Babylon. He had *ten men* with him that were *princes of the king too*, guided by the same peevish resentments that he was; these had been with Gedaliah before, to put themselves

under his protection (ch. xl. 5), and now came again to make him a visit; *and they did eat bread together in Mizpah*. He entertained them generously, and entertained no jealousy of them, notwithstanding the information given him by Johanan. They pretended friendship to him, and gave him no warning to stand on his guard; he was in sincerity friendly to them, and did all he could to oblige them. But those that did *eat bread* with him *lifted up the heel* against him. They did not pick a quarrel with him, but watched an opportunity, when they had him alone, and assassinated him, v. 2.

II. They likewise put all to the sword that they found in arms there, both Jews and Chaldeans, all that were employed under Gedaliah or were in any capacity to revenge his death, v. 3. As if enough of the blood of Israelites had not been shed by the Chaldeans, their own princes here mingle it with the blood of the Chaldeans. The vine-dressers and the husbandmen were busy in the fields, and knew nothing of this bloody massacre; so artfully was it carried on and concealed.

III. Some good honest men, that were going all in tears to lament the desolations of Jerusalem, were drawn in by Ishmael, and murdered with the rest. Observe, 1. Whence they came (v. 5)—*from Shechem, Samaria, and Shiloh*, places that had been famous, but were now reduced; they belonged to the ten tribes, but there were some in those countries that retained an affection for the worship of the God of Israel. 2. Whither they were going—to *the house of the Lord*, the temple at Jerusalem, which, no doubt, they had heard of the destruction of, and were going to pay their respects to its ashes, to see its ruins, that their eye might affect their heart with sorrow for them. They *favour the dust thereof*, Ps. cii. 14. They took *offerings and incense in their hand*, that if they should find any altar there, though it were but an altar of earth, and any priest ready to officiate, they might not be without something to offer; if not, yet they showed their good-will, as Abraham, when he came to *the place of the altar*, though the altar was gone. The people of God used to go rejoicing to *the house of the Lord*, but these went in the habit of mourners, with *their clothes rent and their heads shaven*; for the providence of God loudly called to weeping and mourning, because it was not with the faithful worshippers of God as in months past. 3. How they were decoyed into a fatal snare by Ishmael's malice. Hearing of their approach, he resolved to be the death of them too, so bloodthirsty was he. He seemed as if he hated every one that had the name of an Israelite or the face of an honest man. These pilgrims towards Jerusalem he had a spite to, for the sake of their errand. Ishmael went out to meet them with crocodiles' tears, pretending to bewail the deso-

lations of Jerusalem as much as they; and, to try how they stood affected to Gedaliah and his government, he courted them into the town and found them to have a respect for him, which confirmed him in his resolution to murder them. *He said, Come to Gedaliah*, pretending he would have them come and live with him, when really he intended that they should come and die with him, v. 6. They had heard such a character of Gedaliah that they were willing enough to be acquainted with him; but Ishmael, when he had them *in the midst of the town*, fell upon them and *slew them* (v. 7), and no doubt took the offerings they had and converted them to his own use; for he that would not stick at such a murder would not stick at sacrilege. Notice is taken of his disposing of the dead bodies of these and the rest that he had slain; he tumbled them all into a great *pit* (v. 7), the same pit that Asa king of Judah had digged long before, either in the city or adjoining to it, when he built or fortified Mizpah (1 Kings xv. 22), to be a frontier-garrison against *Baasha king of Israel* and *for fear of him*, v. 9. Note, Those that dig pits with a good intention know not what bad use they may be put to, one time or other. He slew so many that he could not afford them each a grave, or would not do them so much honour, but threw them all promiscuously into one pit. Among these last that were doomed to the slaughter there were ten that obtained a pardon, by working, not on the compassion, but the covetousness, of those that had them at their mercy, v. 8. *They said to Ishmael*, when he was about to suck their blood, like an insatiable horseleech, after that of their companions, *Slay us not, for we have treasures in the field*, country treasures, large stocks upon the ground, abundance of such commodities as the country affords, *wheat and barley, and oil and honey*, intimating that they would discover it to him and put him in possession of it all, if he would spare them. *Skin for skin, and all that a man has, will he give for his life*. This bait prevailed. Ishmael saved them, not for the love of mercy, but for the love of money. Here were riches kept for the owners thereof, not to *their hurt* (Eccl. v. 13) and to cause them to *lose their lives* (Job xxxi. 39), but to their good and the preserving of their lives. Solomon observes that sometimes *the ransom of a man's life is his riches*. But those who think thus to bribe death, when it comes with commission, and plead with it, saying, *Slay us not, for we have treasures in the field*, will find death inexorable and themselves wretchedly deceived.

IV. He carried off the people prisoners. *The king's daughters* (whom the Chaldeans cared not for troubling themselves with when they had the king's sons) and the poor of the land, the vine-dressers and husbandmen, that were committed to Gedaliah's

charge, were all led away prisoners towards the country of *the Ammonites* (v. 10), Ishmael probably intending to make a present of them, as the trophies of his barbarous victory, to the king of that country, that set him on. This melancholy story is a warning to us never to be secure in this world. Worse may be yet to come when we think the worst is over; and that end of one trouble, which we fancy to be the end of all trouble, may prove to be the beginning of another, of a greater. These prisoners thought, *Surely the bitterness of death, and of captivity, is past*; and yet some died by the sword and others went into captivity. When we think ourselves safe, and begin to be easy, destruction may come that way that we little expected it. There is many a ship wrecked in the harbour. We can never be sure of peace on this side heaven.

11 But when Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces that *were* with him, heard of all the evil that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had done, 12 Then they took all the men, and went to fight with Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and found him by the great waters that *are* in Gibeon. 13 Now it came to pass, *that* when all the people which *were* with Ishmael saw Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces that *were* with him, then they were glad. 14 So all the people that Ishmael had carried away captive from Mizpah cast about and returned, and went unto Johanan the son of Kareah. 15 But Ishmael the son of Nethaniah escaped from Johanan with eight men, and went to the Ammonites. 16 Then took Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces that *were* with him, all the remnant of the people whom he had recovered from Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, from Mizpah, after *that* he had slain Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, *even* mighty men of war, and the women, and the children, and the eunuchs, whom he had brought again from Gibeon: 17 And they departed, and dwelt in the habitation of Chimham, which is by Beth-lehem, to go to enter into Egypt, 18 Because of the Chaldeans: for they were afraid of them, because Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had slain Gedaliah the son of Ahikam,



whom the king of Babylon made governor in the land.

It would have been well if Johanan, when he gave information to Gedaliah of Ishmael's treasonable design, though he could not obtain leave to kill Ishmael and to prevent it that way, yet had staid with Gedaliah; for he, and his captains, and their forces, might have been a life-guard to Gedaliah and a terror to Ishmael, and so have prevented the mischief without the effusion of blood: but, it seems, they were out upon some expedition, perhaps no good one, and so were out of the way when they should have been upon the best service. Those that affect to ramble are many times out of their place when they are most needed. However, at length they hear of all the evil that Ishmael had done (v. 11), and are resolved to try an after-game, which we have an account of in these verses. 1. We heartily wish Johanan could have taken revenge upon the murderers, but he prevailed only to rescue the captives. Those that had shed so much blood, it was a pity but their blood should have been shed; and it is strange that vengeance suffered them to live; yet it did. Johanan gathered what forces he could and went to fight with Ishmael (v. 12), upon notice of the murders he had committed (for though he concealed it for a time (v. 4) yet murder will out) and which way he was gone; he pursued him, and overtook him by the great pool of Gibeon, which we read of, 2 Sam. ii. 13. And, upon his appearing with such a force, Ishmael's heart failed him, his guilty conscience flew in his face, and he durst not stand his ground against an enemy that was something like a match for him. The most cruel are often the most cowardly. The poor captives were glad when they saw Johanan and the captains that were with him, looking upon them as their deliverers (v. 13), and they immediately found a way to wheel about and come over to them (v. 14), Ishmael not offering to detain them when he saw Johanan. Note, Those that would be helped must help themselves. These captives staid not till their conquerors were beaten, but took the first opportunity to make their escape, as soon as they saw their friends appear and their enemies thereby disheartened. Ishmael quitted his prey to save his life, and escaped with eight men, v. 15. It seems, two of his ten men, that were his banditti or assassins (spoken of v. 1), either deserted him or were killed in the engagement; but he made the best of his way to the Ammonites, as a perfect renegade, that had quite abandoned all relation to the commonwealth of Israel, though he was of the seed royal, and we hear no more of him. 2. We heartily wish that Johanan, when he had rescued the captives, would have sat down quietly with them, and governed them peaceably, as Gedaliah did; but, instead of that, he is for

leading them into the land of Egypt, as Ishmael would have led them into the land of the Ammonites; so that though he got the command over them in a better way than Ishmael did, and honestly enough, yet he did not use it much better. Gedaliah, who was of a meek and quiet spirit, was a great blessing to them; but Johanan, who was of a fierce and restless spirit, was set over them for their hurt, and to complete their ruin, even after they were, as they thought, redeemed. Thus did God still walk contrary to them. (1.) The resolution of Johanan and the captains was very rash; nothing would serve them but they would go to enter into Egypt (v. 17), and, in order to that, they encamped for a time in the habitation of Chimham, by Bethlehem, David's city. Probably it was some land which David gave to Chimham, the son of Barzillai, which, though it returned to David's family at the year of Jubilee, yet still bore the name of Chimham. Here Johanan made his headquarters, steering his course towards Egypt, either from a personal affection to that country or an ancient national confidence in the Egyptians for help in distress. Some of the mighty men of war, it seems, had escaped; those he took with him, and the women and children, whom he had recovered from Ishmael, who were thus emptied from vessel to vessel, because they were yet unchanged. (2.) The reason for this resolution was very frivolous. They pretended that they were afraid of the Chaldeans, that they would come and do I know not what with them, because Ishmael had killed Gedaliah, v. 18. I cannot think they really had any apprehensions of danger upon this account; for, though it is true that the Chaldeans had cause enough to resent the murder of their viceroy, yet they were not so unreasonable, or unjust, as to revenge it upon those who appeared so vigorously against the murderers. But they only make use of this as a sham to cover that corrupt inclination of their unbelieving ancestors, which was so strong in them, to return into Egypt. Those will justly lose their comfort in real fears that excuse themselves in sin with pretended fears.

## CHAP. XLII.

Johanan and the captains being strongly bent upon going into Egypt, either their afflictions or politics advising them to take that course, they had a great desire that God should direct them to do so; but like Balaam, who, when he was determined to go and curse Israel, asked God leave. Here is, 1. The fair bargain that was made between Jeremiah and them about consulting God in this matter, ver. 1—6. 2. The message at large which God sent them, in answer to their enquiry, in which, 1. They are commanded and encouraged to continue in the land of Judah, and assured that if they did so it should be well with them, ver. 7—10. 2. They are forbidden to go to Egypt, and are plainly told that if they did it would be their ruin, ver. 11—15. 3. They are charged with inconsistency in their asking what God's will was in this matter and disobedience when they were told what it was; and sentence is accordingly passed upon them, ver. 16—22.

THEN all the captains of the forces, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiah, and all the people from the least even

unto the greatest, came near, 2 And said unto Jeremiah the prophet, Let, we beseech thee, our supplication be accepted before thee, and pray for us unto the LORD thy God, *even* for all this remnant; (for we are left *but* a few of many, as thine eyes do behold us:) 3 That the LORD thy God may shew us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do. 4 Then Jeremiah the prophet said unto them, I have heard *you*; behold, I will pray unto the LORD your God according to your words; and it shall come to pass, *that* whatsoever thing the LORD shall answer you, I will declare *it* unto you; I will keep nothing back from you. 5 Then they said to Jeremiah, The LORD be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not even according to all things for the which the LORD thy God shall send thee to us. 6 Whether *it* be good, or whether *it* be evil, we will obey the voice of the LORD our God, to whom we send thee; that it may be well with us, when we obey the voice of the LORD our God.

We have reason to wonder how Jeremiah the prophet escaped the sword of Ishmael; it seems he did escape, and it was not the first time that the Lord hid him. It is strange also that in these violent turns he was not consulted before now, and his advice asked and taken. But it should seem as if they knew not that a prophet was among them. Though this people were *as brands plucked out of the fire*, yet have they not returned to the Lord. This people has a *revolting and a rebellious heart*; and contempt of God and his providence, God and his prophets, is still *the sin that most easily besets* them. But now at length, to serve a turn, Jeremiah is sought out, and *all the captains, Johanan* himself not excepted, with *all the people from the least to the greatest*, make him a visit; they *came near* (v. 1), which intimates that hitherto they had kept at a distance from the prophet and had been shy of him. Now here,

I. They desire him by prayer to ask direction from God what they should do in the present critical juncture, v. 2, 3. They express themselves wonderfully well. 1. With great respect to the prophet. Though he was poor and low, and under their command, yet they apply to him with humility and submissiveness, as petitioners for his assistance, which yet they intimate their own unworthiness of: *Let, we beseech thee, our supplication be accepted before thee*. They

compliment him thus in hopes to persuade him to say as they would have him say. 2. With a great opinion of his interest in heaven. "*Pray for us, who know not how to pray for ourselves. Pray to the Lord thy God, for we are unworthy to call him ours, nor have we reason to expect any favour from him.*" 3. With a great sense of their need of divine direction. They speak of themselves as objects of compassion: "*We are but a remnant, but a few of many*"; how easily will such a remnant be swallowed up, and yet it is a pity that it should. *Thy eyes* see what distress we are in, what a plunge we are at; if thou canst do any thing, help us." 4. With desire of divine direction: "*Let the Lord thy God take this ruin into his thoughts and under his hand, and show us the way wherein we may walk and may expect to have his presence with us, and the thing that we may do, the course we may take for our own safety.*" Note, In every difficult doubtful case our eye must be up to God for direction. They then might expect to be directed by a *spirit of prophecy*, which has now ceased; but we may still in faith pray to be guided by a *spirit of wisdom* in our hearts and the hints of Providence.

II. Jeremiah faithfully promises them to pray for direction for them, and, whatever message God should send to them by him, he would deliver it to them just as he received it without adding, altering, or diminishing, v. 4. Ministers may hence learn, 1. Conscientiously to pray for those who desire their prayers: *I will pray for you according to your words*. Though they had slighted him, yet, like Samuel when he was slighted, he will not *sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for them*, 1 Sam. xii. 23. 2. Conscientiously to advise those who desire their advice as near as they can to the mind of God, *not keeping back any thing that is profitable for them*, whether it be pleasing or no, but to *declare to them the whole counsel of God*, that they may approve themselves true to their trust.

III. They fairly promise that they will be governed by the will of God, as soon as they know what it is (v. 5, 6), and they had the impudence to appeal to God concerning their sincerity herein, though at the same time they dissembled: "*The Lord be a true and faithful witness between us*"; do thou in the fear of God tell us truly what his mind is and then we will in the fear of God comply with it, and for this the Lord the Judge be Judge between us." Note, Those that expect to have the benefit of good ministers' prayers must conscientiously hearken to their preaching and be governed by it, as far as it agrees with the mind of God. Nothing could be better said than this was: *Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God, that it may be well with us*. 1. They now call God *their God*, for Jeremiah had encouraged



them to call him so (v. 4): *I will pray to the Lord your God.* He is ours, and therefore *we will obey his voice.* Our relation to God strongly obliges us to obedience. 2. They promise to *obey his voice* because they sent the prophet to him to consult him. Note, We do not truly desire to know the mind of God if we do not fully resolve to comply with it when we do know it. 3. It is an implicit universal obedience that they here promise. They will do what God appoints them to do, *whether it be good or whether it be evil*: "Though it may seem evil to us, yet we will believe that if God command it it is certainly good, and we must not dispute it, but do it. Whatever God commands, whether it be easy or difficult, agreeable to our inclinations or contrary to them, whether it be cheap or costly, fashionable or unfashionable, whether we get or lose by it in our worldly interests, if it be our duty, we will do it." 4. It is upon a very good consideration that they promise this, a reasonable and powerful one, *that it may be well with us*, which intimates a conviction that they could not expect it should be well with them upon any other terms.

7 And it came to pass after ten days, that the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah. 8 Then called he Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces which *were* with him, and all the people from the least even to the greatest, 9 And said unto them, Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, unto whom ye sent me to present your supplication before him; 10 If ye will still abide in this land, then will I build you, and not pull *you* down, and I will plant you, and not pluck *you* up: for I repent me of the evil that I have done unto you. 11 Be not afraid of the king of Babylon, of whom ye are afraid; be not afraid of him, saith the LORD: for *I am* with you to save you, and to deliver you from his hand. 12 And I will show mercies unto you, that he may have mercy upon you, and cause you to return to your own land. 13 But if ye say, We will not dwell in this land, neither obey the voice of the LORD your God, 14 Saying, No; but we will go into the land of Egypt, where we shall see no war, nor hear the sound of the trumpet, nor have hunger of bread; and there will we dwell: 15 And now therefore hear the word of the LORD, ye remnant of Judah; Thus

saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; If ye wholly set your faces to enter into Egypt, and go to sojourn there; 16 Then it shall come to pass, *that* the sword, which ye feared, shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt, and the famine, whereof ye were afraid, shall follow close after you there in Egypt; and there ye shall die. 17 So shall it be with all the men that set their faces to go into Egypt to sojourn there; they shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence: and none of them shall remain or escape from the evil that I will bring upon them. 18 For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; As mine anger and my fury hath been poured forth upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem; so shall my fury be poured forth upon you, when ye shall enter into Egypt: and ye shall be an execration, and an astonishment, and a curse, and a reproach; and ye shall see this place no more. 19 The LORD hath said concerning you, O ye remnant of Judah; Go ye not into Egypt: know certainly that I have admonished you this day. 20 For ye dissembled in your hearts, when ye sent me unto the LORD your God, saying, Pray for us unto the LORD our God; and according unto all that the LORD our God shall say, so declare unto us, and we will do *it*. 21 And *now* I have this day declared *it* to you; but ye have not obeyed the voice of the LORD your God, nor any *thing* for the which he hath sent me unto you. 22 Now therefore know certainly that ye shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, in the place whither ye desire to go *and* to sojourn.

We have here the answer which Jeremiah was sent to deliver to those who employed him to ask counsel of God.

1. It did not come immediately, not till *ten days after*, v. 7. They were thus long held in suspense, perhaps, to punish them for their hypocrisy or to show that Jeremiah did not speak of himself, nor what he would, for he could not speak when he would, but must wait for instructions. However, it teaches us to continue waiting upon God for direction in our way. *The vision is for an appointed time, and at the end it shall speak.*

II. When it did come he delivered it publicly, both to the *captains* and to all the *people*, from the meanest to those in the highest station; he delivered it fully and faithfully as he received it, as he had promised that he would keep nothing back from them. If Jeremiah had been to direct them by his own prudence, perhaps he could not have told what to advise them to, the case was so difficult; but what he has to advise is what *the Lord the God of Israel saith*, to whom they had sent him, and therefore they were bound in honour and duty to observe it. And this he tells them,

1. That it is the will of God that they should stay where they are, and his promise that, if they do so, it shall undoubtedly be *well with them*; he would have them still to *abide in this land*, v. 10. Their brethren were forced out of it into captivity, and this was their affliction; let those therefore count it a mercy that they may stay in it and a duty to stay in it. Let those whose lot is in Canaan never quit it while they can keep it. It would have been enough to oblige them if God had only said, "I charge you upon your allegiance to *abide still in the land*," but he rather persuades them to it as a friend than commands it as a prince. (1.) He expresses a very tender concern for them in their present calamitous condition: *It repenteth me of the evil that I have done unto you*. Though they had shown small sign of their repenting of their sins, yet God, as one *grieved for the misery of Israel* (Judg. x. 16), begins to repent of the judgments he had brought upon them for their sins. Not that he changed his mind, but he was very ready to change his way and to return in mercy to them. God's time to repent himself concerning his servants is when he sees that, as here, their strength is gone, and *there is none shut up or left*, Deut. xxxii. 36. (2.) He answers the argument they had against abiding in this land. *They feared the king of Babylon* (ch. xli. 18), lest he should come and avenge the death of Gedaliah upon them, though they were no way accessory to it, nay, had witnessed against it. The surmise was foreign and unreasonable; but, if there had been any ground for it, enough is here said to remove it (v. 11): "*Be not afraid of the king of Babylon*, though he is a man of great might and little mercy, and a very arbitrary prince, whose will is a law, and therefore you are afraid he will upon this pretence, though without colour of reason, take advantage against you; *be not afraid of him*, for that fear will bring a snare: fear not him, for *I am with you*; and, if God be for you to save you, who can be against you to hurt you?" Thus has God provided to obviate and silence even the causeless fears of his people, which discourage them in the way of their duty; there is enough in the promises to encourage them. (3.) He assures them

that if they will still abide in this land they shall not only be safe from the king of Babylon, but be made happy by the King of kings: "*I will build you and plant you*; you shall take root again, and be the new foundation of another state, a phoenix-kingdom, rising out of the ashes of the last." It is added (v. 12), *I will show mercies unto you*. Note, In all our comforts we may read God's mercies. God will show them mercy in this, that not only the king of Babylon shall not destroy them, but he shall *have mercy upon them* and help to settle them. Note, Whatever kindness men do us we must attribute it to God's kindness. He makes those whom he pities to be pitied even by those who carried them captives, Ps. cvi. 46. "The king of Babylon, having now the disposal of the country, shall *cause you to return to your own land*, shall settle you again in your own habitations and put you in possession of the lands that formerly belonged to you." Note, God has made that our duty which is really our privilege, and our obedience will be its own recompence. "*Abide in this land*, and it shall be your own land again and you shall continue in it. Do not quit it now that you stand so fair for the enjoyment of it again. Be not so unwise as to *forsake your own mercies for lying vanities*."

2. That as they tender the favour of God and their own happiness they must by no means think of going into Egypt, not thither of all places, not to that land out of which God had delivered their fathers and which he had so often warned them not to make alliance with nor to put confidence in. Observe here, (1.) The sin they are supposed to be guilty of (and to him that knew their hearts it was more than a supposition): "You begin to say, *We will not dwell in this land* (v. 13); we will never think that we can be safe in it, no, not though God himself undertake our protection. We will not continue in it, no, not *in obedience to the voice of the Lord our God*. He may say what he please, but we will do what we please. We will go into the land of Egypt, and *there will we dwell*, whether God give us leave and go along with us or no," v. 14. It is supposed that their hearts were upon it: "*If you wholly set your faces to enter into Egypt*, are obstinately resolved that you will go and *sojourn there*, though God oppose you in it both by his word and by his providence, then take what follows." Now the reason they go upon in this resolution is that "*in Egypt we shall see no war, nor have hunger of bread*, as we have had for a long time in this land," v. 14. Note, It is folly to quit our place, especially to quit the holy land, because we meet with trouble in it; but greater folly to think by changing our place to escape the judgments of God, and that evil which pursues sinners in every way of disobedience, and which there is no



escaping but by returning to our allegiance. (2.) The sentence passed upon them for this sin, if they will persist in it. It is pronounced in God's name (v. 15): "*Hear the word of the Lord, you remnant of Judah, who think that because you are a remnant you must be spared of course (v. 2) and indulged in your own humour.*" [1.] Did the sword and famine frighten them? Those very judgments shall pursue them into Egypt, shall overtake them, and overcome them there (v. 16, 17): "You think, because war and famine have long been raging in this land, that they are entailed upon it; whereas, if you trust in God, he can make even this land a land of peace to you; you think they are confined to it, and, if you can get clear of this land, you shall get out of the reach of them, but God will send them after you wherever you go." Note, The evils we think to escape by sin we certainly and inevitably run ourselves upon. The men that go to Egypt in contradiction to God's will, to escape the sword and famine, shall die in Egypt by sword and famine. We may apply it to the common calamities of human life; those that are impatient of them, and think to avoid them by changing their place, will find that they are deceived and that they do not at all better themselves. The grievances common to men will meet them wherever they go. All our removes in this world are but from one wilderness to another; still we are where we were. [2.] Did the desolations of Jerusalem frighten them? Were they willing to get as far as they could from them? They shall meet with the second part of them too in Egypt (v. 18): *As my anger and fury have been poured out here upon Jerusalem, so they shall be poured out upon you in Egypt.* Note, Those that have by sin made God their enemy will find him a consuming fire wherever they go. And then you shall be *an execration and an astonishment*. The Hebrews were of old an abomination to the Egyptians (Gen. xliii. 32), and now they shall be made more so than ever. When God's professing people mingle with infidels, and make their court to them, they lose their dignity and make themselves a reproach.

3. That God knew their hypocrisy in their enquiries of him, and that when they asked what he would have them to do they were resolved to take their own way; and therefore the sentence which was before pronounced conditionally is made absolute. Having set before them good and evil, the blessing and the curse, in the close he makes application of what he had said. And here, (1.) He solemnly protests that he had faithfully delivered his message, v. 19. The conclusion of the whole matter is, "*Go not down into Egypt; you disobey the command of God if you do, and what I have said to you will be a witness against you; for know certainly that, whether you will hear or whe-*

*ther you will forbear, I have plainly admonished you; you cannot now plead ignorance of the mind of God.*" (2.) He charges them with base dissimulation in the application they made to him for divine direction (v. 20): "*You dissembled in your hearts; you professed one thing and intended another, promising what you never meant to perform.*" *You have used deceit against your souls* (so the margin reads it); for those that think to put a cheat upon God will prove in the end to have put a damning cheat upon themselves. (3.) He is already aware that they are determined to go contrary to the command of God; probably they discovered it in their countenance and secret mutterings already, before he had finished his discourse. However, he spoke from him who knew their hearts: "*You have not obeyed the voice of the Lord your God; you have not a disposition to obey it.*" Thus Moses, in the close of his farewell sermon, had told them (Deut. xxxi. 27, 29), *I know thy rebellion and thy stiff neck, and that you will corrupt yourselves.* Admire the patience of God, that he is pleased to speak to those who, he knows, will not regard him, and deal with those who, he knows, will deal very treacherously, Isa. xlviii. 8. (4.) He therefore reads them their doom, ratifying what he had said before: *Know certainly that you shall die by the sword, v. 22.* God's threatenings may be vilified, but cannot be nullified, by the unbelief of man. *Famine and pestilence shall pursue these sinners; for there is no place privileged from divine arrests, nor can any malefactors go out of God's jurisdiction. You shall die in the place whither you desire to go.* Note, We know not what is good for ourselves; and that often proves afflictive, and sometimes fatal, which we are most fond of and have our hearts most set upon.

## CHAP. XLIII.

Jeremiah had faithfully delivered his message from God in the foregoing chapter, and the case was made so very plain by it that one would have thought there needed no more words about it; but we find it quite otherwise. Here is, I. The people's contempt of the message; they denied it to be the word of God (ver. 1-3) and then made no difficulty of going directly contrary to it. Into Egypt they went, and took Jeremiah himself along with them, ver. 4-7. II. God's pursuit of them with another message, foretelling the king of Babylon's pursuit of them into Egypt, ver. 8-13.

AND it came to pass, *that* when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking unto all the people all the words of the Lord their God, for which the Lord their God had sent him to them, *even* all these words, 2 Then spake Azariah the son of Hoshaiiah, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the proud men, saying unto Jeremiah, Thou speakest falsely: the Lord our God hath not sent thee to say, Go not into Egypt to sojourn there: 3 But Baruch the son of Neriah setteth thee on against

us, for to deliver us into the hand of the Chaldeans, that they might put us to death, and carry us away captives into Babylon. 4 So Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces, and all the people, obeyed not the voice of the LORD, to dwell in the land of Judah. 5 But Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces, took all the remnant of Judah, that were returned from all nations, whither they had been driven, to dwell in the land of Judah; 6 *Even* men, and women, and children, and the king's daughters, and every person that Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had left with Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, and Jeremiah the prophet, and Baruch the son of Neriah. 7 So they came into the land of Egypt: for they obeyed not the voice of the LORD. Thus came they *even* to Tahpanhes.

What God said to the builders of Babel may be truly said of this people that Jeremiah is now dealing with: *Now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do*, Gen. xi. 6. They have a fancy for Egypt, and to Egypt they will go, whatever God himself says to the contrary. Jeremiah made them hear all he had to say, though he saw them uneasy at it; it was what the Lord their God had sent him to speak to them, and they shall have it all. And now let us see what they have to say to it.

I. They deny it to be a message from God: *Johanan, and all the proud men, said to Jeremiah, Thou speakest falsely*, v. 2. See here, 1. What was the cause of their disobedience—it was pride; only by that comes contention both with God and man. They were *proud men* that gave the lie to the prophet. They could not bear the contradiction of their sentiments and the control of their designs, no, not by the divine wisdom, by the divine will itself. Pharaoh said, *Who is the Lord, that I should obey him?* Exod. v. 2. The proud unhumbled heart of man is one of the most daring enemies God has on this side hell. 2. What was the colour for their disobedience. They would not acknowledge it to be the word of God: *The Lord hath not sent thee* on this errand to us. Either they were not convinced that what was said came from God or (which I rather think) though they were convinced of it they would not own it. The light shone strongly in their face, but they either shut their eyes against it or would not confess that they saw it. Note, The reason why

men deny the scriptures to be the word of God is because they are resolved not to conform to scripture-rules, and so an obstinate infidelity is made the sorry subterfuge of a wilful disobedience. If God had spoken to them by an angel, or as he did from Mount Sinai, they would have said that it was a delusion. Had they not consulted Jeremiah as a prophet? Had he not waited to receive instructions from God what to say to them? Had not what he said all the usual marks of prophecy upon it? Was not the prophet himself embarked in the same bottom with them? What interests could he have separate from theirs? Had he not always approved himself an Israelite indeed? And had not God proved him a prophet indeed? Had any of his words ever fallen to the ground? Why, truly, they had some good thoughts of Jeremiah, but they suggest (v. 3), *Baruch sets thee on against us*. A likely thing, that Baruch should be in a plot to deliver them into the hands of the Chaldeans; and what would he get by that? If Jeremiah and he had been so well affected to the Chaldeans as they would represent them, they would have gone away at first with Nebuzaradan, when he courted them, to Babylon, and not have staid to take their lot with this despised ungrateful remnant. But the best services are no fences against malice and slander. Or, if Baruch had been so ill disposed, could they think Jeremiah would be so influenced by him as to make God's name an authority to patronise so villainous a purpose? Note, Those that are resolved to contradict the great ends of the ministry are industrious to bring a bad name upon it. When men will persist in sin they represent those that would turn them from it as designing men for themselves, nay, as ill-designing men against their neighbours. It is well for persons who are thus misrepresented that their witness is in heaven and their record on high.

II. They determine to go to Egypt notwithstanding. They resolve not to dwell in the land of Judah, as God had ordered them (v. 4), but to go themselves with one consent and to take all that they had under their power along with them to Egypt. Those that came from all the nations whither they had been driven, to dwell in the land of Judah, out of a sincere affection to that land, they would not leave to their liberty, but forced them to go with them into Egypt (v. 5), *men, women, and children* (v. 6), a long journey into a strange country, an idolatrous country, a country that had never been kind or faithful to Israel; yet thither they would go, though they deserted their own land and threw themselves out of God's protection. It is the folly of men that they know not when they are well off, and often ruin themselves by endeavouring to better themselves; and it is the pride of great men to force those they have under their power to follow them,



though ever so much against their duty and interest. These proud men compelled even Jeremiah the prophet and Baruch his scribe to go along with them to Egypt; they carried them away as prisoners, partly to punish them (and a greater punishment they could not inflict upon them than to force them against their consciences; theirs is the worst of tyranny who say to men's souls, even to good men's souls, *Bow down, that we may go over*), partly to put some reputation upon themselves and their own way. Though the prophets were under a force, they would make the world believe that they were voluntary in going along with them; and who could have blamed them for acting contrary to the word of the Lord if the prophets themselves had acted so? *They came to Tahpanhes*, a famous city of Egypt (so called from a queen of that name, 1 Kings xi. 19), the same with *Hanes* (Isa. xxx. 4); it was now the metropolis, for Pharaoh's house was there, v. 9. No place could serve these proud men to settle in but the royal city and near the court, so little mindful were they of Joseph's wisdom, who would have his brethren settle in Goshen. If they had had the spirit of Israelites, they would have chosen rather to dwell in the wilderness of Judah than in the most pompous populous cities of Egypt.

8 Then came the word of the LORD unto Jeremiah in Tahpanhes, saying, 9 Take great stones in thine hand, and hide them in the clay in the brick-kiln, which *is* at the entry of Pharaoh's house, in Tahpanhes, in the sight of the men of Judah; 10 And say unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will send and take Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will set his throne upon these stones that I have hid; and he shall spread his royal pavilion over them. 11 And when he cometh, he shall smite the land of Egypt, *and deliver such as are* for death to death; and such *as are* for captivity to captivity; and such *as are* for the sword to the sword. 12 And I will kindle a fire in the houses of the gods of Egypt; and he shall burn them, and carry them away captives: and he shall array himself with the land of Egypt, as a shepherd putteth on his garment; and he shall go forth from thence in peace. 13 He shall break also the images of Beth-shemesh, that *is* in the land of Egypt; and the

houses of the gods of the Egyptians shall lie burn with fire.

We have here, as also in the next chapter, Jeremiah prophesying in Egypt. Jeremiah was now in Tahpanhes, for there his lords and masters were; he was there among idolatrous Egyptians and treacherous Israelites; but there, 1. He received the word of the Lord; it came to him. God can find his people, with the visits of his grace, wherever they are; and, when his ministers are bound, yet the word of the Lord is not bound. The spirit of prophecy was not confined to the land of Israel. When Jeremiah went into Egypt, not out of choice, but by constraint, God withdrew not his wonted favour from him. 2. What he received of the Lord he delivered to the people. Wherever we are we must endeavour to do good, for that is our business in this world. Now we find two messages which Jeremiah was appointed and entrusted to deliver when he was in Egypt. We may suppose that he rendered what services he could to his countrymen in Egypt, at least as far as they would be acceptable, in performing the ordinary duties of a prophet, praying for them and instructing and comforting them; but only two messages of his, which he had received immediately from God, are recorded, one in this chapter, relating to Egypt itself and foretelling its destruction, the other in the next chapter, relating to the Jews in Egypt. God had told them before that if they went into Egypt the sword they feared should follow them; here he tells them further that the sword of Nebuchadrezzar, which they were in a particular manner afraid of, should follow them.

I. This is foretold by a sign. Jeremiah must take *great stones*, such as are used for foundations, and *lay them in the clay of the furnace, or brick-kiln*, which is in the *open way, or beside the way* that leads to Pharaoh's house (v. 9), some remarkable place in view of the royal palace. Egypt was famous for brick-kilns, witness the slavery of the Israelites there, whom they forced to make bricks (Exod. v. 7), which perhaps was now remembered against them. The foundation of Egypt's desolation was laid in those brick-kilns, in *that clay*. This he must do, not in the sight of the Egyptians (they knew not Jeremiah's character), but *in the sight of the men of Judah* to whom he was sent, that, since he could not prevent their going into Egypt, he might bring them to repent of their going.

II. It is foretold in express words, as express as can be, 1. That the king, the present king of Babylon, Nebuchadrezzar, the very same that had been employed in the destruction of Jerusalem, should come in person against the land of Egypt, should make himself master even of this royal city, by the same token that he should *set his throne* in

that very place where *these stones* were laid, v. 10. This minute circumstance is particularly foretold, that, when it was accomplished, they might be put in mind of the prophecy and confirmed in their belief of the extent and certainty of the divine prescience, to which the smallest and most contingent events are evident. God calls Nebuchadnezzar his servant, because herein he executed God's will, accomplished his purposes, and was instrumental to carry on his designs. Note, The world's princes are God's servants and he makes what use he pleases of them, and even those that know him not, nor aim at his honour, are the tools which his providence makes use of. 2. That he should destroy many of the Egyptians, and have them all at his mercy (v. 11): *He shall smite the land of Egypt*; and, though it has been always a warlike nation, yet none shall be able to make head against him, but whom he will he shall slay, and by what sort of death he will, whether pestilence (for that is here meant by *death*, as ch. xv. 2) by shutting them up in places infected, or by the sword of war or justice, in cold blood or hot. And whom he will he shall save alive and carry into *captivity*. The Jews, by going into Egypt, brought the Chaldeans thither, and so did but ill repay those that entertained them. Those who promised to protect Israel from the king of Babylon exposed themselves to him. 3. That he shall destroy the idols of Egypt, both the temples and the images of their gods (v. 12): *He shall burn the houses of the gods of Egypt*, but it shall be with a fire of God's kindling; the fire of God's wrath fastens upon them, and then he burns some of them and carries others captive, Isa. xlvi. 1. *Beth-shemesh*, or *the house of the sun*, was so called from a temple there built to the sun, where at certain times there was a general meeting of the worshippers of the sun. The statues or standing images there he shall *break in pieces* (v. 13) and carry away the rich materials of them. It intimates that he should lay all waste when even the temple and the images should not escape the fury of the victorious army. The king of Babylon was himself a great idolater and a patron of idolatry; he had his temples and images in honour of the sun as well as the Egyptians; and yet he is employed to destroy the idols of Egypt. Thus God sometimes makes one wicked man, or wicked nation, a scourge and plague to another. 4. That he shall make himself master of the land of Egypt, and none shall be able to plead its cause or avenge its quarrel (v. 12): *He shall array himself with the rich spoils of the land of Egypt*, both beautify and fortify himself with them. He shall array himself with them as ornaments and as armour; and this, though it shall be a rich and heavy booty, being expert in war, and expeditious, he shall slip on with as much ease and in as little time, in comparison, as a shepherd slips

on his garment, when he goes to turn out his sheep in a morning. And being loaded with the wealth of many other nations, the fruits of his conquests, he shall make no more of the spoils of the land of Egypt than of a shepherd's coat. And when he has taken what he pleases (as Benhadad threatened to do, 1 Kings xx. 6) he shall *go forth in peace*, without any molestation given him, or any precipitation for fear of it, so effectually reduced shall the land of Egypt be. This destruction of Egypt by the king of Babylon is foretold, Ezek. xxix. 19 and xxx. 10. Babylon lay at a great distance from Egypt, and yet thence the destruction of Egypt comes; for God can make those judgments strike home which are far-fetched.

## CHAP. XLIV.

In this chapter we have, I. An awakening sermon which Jeremiah preaches to the Jews in Egypt, to reprove them for their idolatry, notwithstanding the warnings given them both by the word and the rod of God and to threaten the judgments of God against them for it, ver. 1-14. II. The impudent and impious contempt which the people put upon this admonition, and their declared resolution to persist in their idolatries notwithstanding, in despite of God and Jeremiah, ver. 15-19. III. The sentence passed upon them for their obstinacy, that they should all be cut off and perish in Egypt except a very small number; and, as a sign or earnest of it, the king of Egypt should shortly fall into the hands of the king of Babylon and be unable any longer to protect them, ver. 20-30.

THE word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the Jews which dwell in the land of Egypt, which dwell at Migdol, and at Tahpanhes, and at Noph, and in the country of Pathros, saying, 2 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Ye have seen all the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem, and upon all the cities of Judah; and, behold, this day they *are* a desolation, and no man dwelleth therein, 3 Because of their wickedness which they have committed to provoke me to anger, in that they went to burn incense, and to serve other gods, whom they knew not, *neither* they, ye, nor your fathers. 4 Howbeit I sent unto you all my servants the prophets, rising early and sending *them*, saying, Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate. 5 But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear to turn from their wickedness, to burn no incense unto other gods. 6 Wherefore my fury and mine anger was poured forth, and was kindled in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; and they are wasted and desolate, as at this day. 7 Therefore now thus saith the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel; Wherefore commit ye *this* great evil against your souls,



to cut off from you man and woman, child and suckling, out of Judah, to leave you none to remain; 8 In that ye provoke me unto wrath with the works of your hands, burning incense unto other gods in the land of Egypt, whither ye be gone to dwell, that ye might cut yourselves off, and that ye might be a curse and a reproach among all the nations of the earth? 9 Have ye forgotten the wickedness of your fathers, and the wickedness of the kings of Judah, and the wickedness of their wives, and your own wickedness, and the wickedness of your wives, which they have committed in the land of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem? 10 They are not humbled *even* unto this day, neither have they feared, nor walked in my law, nor in my statutes, that I set before you, and before your fathers. 11 Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will set my face against you for evil, and to cut off all Judah. 12 And I will take the remnant of Judah, that have set their faces to go into the land of Egypt to sojourn there, and they shall all be consumed, *and* fall in the land of Egypt; they shall *even* be consumed by the sword *and* by the famine: they shall die, from the least even unto the greatest, by the sword and by the famine: and they shall be an execration, *and* an astonishment, and a curse, and a reproach. 13 For I will punish them that dwell in the land of Egypt, as I have punished Jerusalem, by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence: 14 So that none of the remnant of Judah, which are gone into the land of Egypt to sojourn there, shall escape or remain, that they should return into the land of Judah, to the which they have a desire to return to dwell there: for none shall return but such as shall escape.

The Jews in Egypt were now dispersed into various parts of the country, into *Migdol*, and *Noph*, and other places, and Jeremiah was sent on an errand from God to them, which he delivered either when he had the most of them together in *Patmos*

(v. 15) or going about from place to place preaching to this purport. He delivered this message in the name of the *Lord of hosts, the God of Israel*, and in it,

I. God puts them in mind of the desolations of Judah and Jerusalem, which, though the captives *by the rivers of Babylon* were daily mindful of (Pa. cxxxvii. 1), the fugitives in the cities of Egypt seem to have forgotten and needed to be put in mind of, though, one would have thought, they had not been so long out of sight as to become out of mind (v. 2): *You have seen what a deplorable condition Judah and Jerusalem are brought into; now will you consider whence those desolations came? From the wrath of God; it was his fury and his anger that kindled the fire which made Jerusalem and the cities of Judah waste and desolate* (p. 6); whoever were the instruments of the destruction, they were but instruments: it was a destruction from the Almighty.

II. He puts them in mind of the sins that brought those desolations upon Judah and Jerusalem. It was *for their wickedness*. It was this that provoked God to anger, and especially their idolatry, their *serving other gods* (v. 3) and giving that honour to counterfeit deities, the creatures of their own fancy and the work of their own hands, which should have been given to the true God only. They forsook the God who was known among them, and whose name was great, for gods that they knew not, upstart deities, whose original was obscure and not worth taking notice of: "*Neither they nor you, nor your fathers, could give any rational account why the God of Israel was exchanged for such impostors.*" They knew not that they were gods; nay, they could not but know that they were no gods.

III. He puts them in mind of the frequent and fair warnings he had given them by his word not to serve other gods, the contempt of which warnings was a great aggravation of their idolatry, v. 4. *The prophets were sent with a great deal of care to call to them, saying, Oh! do not this abominable thing that I hate.* It becomes us to speak of sin with the utmost dread and detestation as an abominable thing; it is certainly so, for it is that which God hates, and we are sure that *his judgment is according to truth*. Call it grievous, call it odious, that we may by all means possible put ourselves and others out of love with it. It becomes us to give warning of the danger of sin, and the fatal consequences of it, with all seriousness and earnestness: "*Oh! do not do it. If you love God, do not, for it is provoking to him; if you love your own souls do not, for it is destructive to them.*" Let conscience do this for us in an hour of temptation, when we are ready to yield. O take heed! *do not this abominable thing which the Lord hates; for, if God hates it, thou shouldst hate it.* But did they regard what God said to them?

No: "*They hearkened not, nor inclined their ear* (v. 5); they still persisted in their idolatries; and you see what came of it, therefore God's *anger was poured out upon them, as at this day*. Now this was intended for warning to you, who have not only heard the judgments of God's mouth, as they did, but have likewise seen the judgments of his hand, by which you should be startled and awakened, for they were inflicted in *terror*, that others might hear and fear and do no more as they did, lest they should fare as they fared."

IV. He reproves them for, and upbraids them with, their continued idolatries, now that they had come into Egypt (v. 8): *You burn incense to other gods in the land of Egypt. Therefore God forbade them to go into Egypt, because he knew it would be a snare to them. Those whom God sent into the land of the Chaldeans, though that was an idolatrous country, were there, by the power of God's grace, weaned from idolatry; but those who went against God's mind into the land of the Egyptians were there, by the power of their own corruptions, more wedded than ever to their idolatries; for, when we thrust ourselves without cause or call into places of temptation, it is just with God to leave us to ourselves. In doing this, 1. They did a great deal of injury to themselves and their families: "You commit this great evil against your souls" (v. 7), you wrong them, you deceive them with that which is false, you destroy them, for it will be fatal to them." Note, In sinning against God we sin against our own souls. "It is the ready way to cut yourselves off from all comfort and hope" (v. 8), to cut off your name and honour; so that you will, both by your sin and by your misery, become a curse and a reproach among all nations. It will become a proverb, As wretched as a Jew. It is the ready way to cut off from you all your relations, all that you should have joy of and have your families built up in, *man and woman, child and suckling*, so that Judah shall be a land lost for want of heirs." 2. They filled up the measure of the iniquity of their fathers, and, as if that had been too little for them, added to it (v. 9): "*Have you forgotten the wickedness of those who are gone before you, that you are not humbled for it as you ought to be, and afraid of the consequences of it?*" *Have you forgotten the punishments of your fathers?* so some read it. "Do you not know how dear their idolatry cost them? And yet dare you continue in that vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers, though you received the curse with it?" He reminds them of the sins and punishments of the kings of Judah, who, great as they were, escaped not the judgments of God for their idolatry; yea, and they should have taken warning by the wickedness of their wives, who had seduced them to idolatry. In the original it is, *And of his wives*, which,*

Dr. Lightfoot thinks, tacitly reflects upon Solomon's wives, particularly his Egyptian wives, to whom the idolatry of the kings of Judah owed its original. "Have you forgotten this, and what came of it, that you dare venture upon the same wicked courses?" See Neh. xiii. 18, 26. "Nay, to come to your own times, *Have you forgotten your own wickedness and the wickedness of your wives*, when you lived in prosperity in Jerusalem, and what ruin it brought upon you? But, alas! to what purpose do I speak to them?" (says God to the prophet, v. 10) "*they are not humbled unto this day*, by all the humbling providences that they have been under. *They have not feared, nor walked in my law.*" Note, Those that walk not in the law of God do thereby show that they are destitute of the fear of God.

V. He threatens their utter ruin for their persisting in their idolatry now that they were in Egypt. Judgment is given against them, as before (*ch. xlii. 22*), that they shall perish in Egypt; the decree has gone forth, and shall not be called back. *They set their faces to go into the land of Egypt* (v. 12), were resolute in their purpose against God, and now God is resolute in his purpose against them: *I will set my face to cut off all Judah*, v. 11. Those that think not only to affront, but to confront, God Almighty, will find themselves outaced; for the face of the Lord is against those that do evil, Ps. xxxiv. 16. It is here threatened concerning these idolatrous Jews in Egypt, 1. That *they shall all be consumed*, without exception; no degree nor order among them shall escape: *They shall fall, from the least to the greatest* (v. 12), *high and low, rich and poor*. 2. That *they shall be consumed* by the very same judgments which God made use of for the punishment of Jerusalem, *the sword, famine, and pestilence*, v. 12, 13. They shall not be wasted by natural deaths, as Israel in the wilderness, but by these sore judgments, which, by flying into Egypt, they thought to get out of the reach of. 3. That none (except a very few that will narrowly escape) shall ever return to the land of Judah again, v. 14. They thought, being nearer, that they stood fairer for a return to their own land than those that were carried to Babylon; yet those shall return, and these shall not; for the way in which God has promised us any comfort is much surer than that in which we have projected it for ourselves. Observe, Those that are fretful and discontented will be uneasy and fond of change wherever they are. The Israelites, when they were in the land of Judah, desired to go into Egypt (*ch. xlii. 22*), but when they were in Egypt they desired to return to the land of Judah again; they *lifted up their soul to it* (so it is in the margin), which denotes an earnest desire. But, because they would not dwell there when God commanded it, they shall not dwell there when they desire it. If we walk



contrary to God, he will walk contrary to us. How can those expect to be well off who would not know when they were so, though God himself told them?

15 Then all the men which knew that their wives had burnt incense unto other gods, and all the women that stood by, a great multitude, even all the people that dwelt in the land of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Jeremiah, saying, 16 *As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the LORD, we will not hearken unto thee.* 17 But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings unto her, as we have done, we, and our fathers, our kings, and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: for *then* had we plenty of vic-tuals, and were well, and saw no evil. 18 But since we left off to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings unto her, we have wanted all *things*, and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine. 19 And when we burned incense to the queen of heaven, and poured out drink-offerings unto her, did we make her cakes to worship her, and pour out drink-offerings unto her, without our men?

We have here the people's obstinate refusal to submit to the power of the word of God in the mouth of Jeremiah. We have scarcely such an instance of downright daring contradiction to God himself as this, or such an avowed rebellion of the carnal mind. Observe,

I. The persons who thus set God and his judgments at defiance; it was not some one that was thus obstinate, but the generality of the Jews; and they were such as knew either themselves or their wives to be guilty of the idolatry Jeremiah had reproofed, v. 15. We find, 1. That the women had been more guilty of idolatry and superstition than the men, not because the men stuck closer to the true God and the true religion than the women, but, I fear, because they were generally atheists, and were for no God and no religion at all, and therefore could easily allow their wives to be of a false religion, and to worship false gods. 2. That it was consciousness of guilt that made them impatient of reproof: *They knew that their wives had burnt incense to other gods*, and that they had countenanced them in it, and the women that

*stood by* knew that they had joined with them in their idolatrous usages; so that what Jeremiah said touched them in a sore place, which made them kick against the pricks, as children of Belial, that will not bear the yoke.

II. The reply which these persons made to Jeremiah, and in him to God himself; it is in effect the same with theirs who had the impudence to say to the Almighty, *Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.*

1. They declare their resolution not to do as God commanded them, but what they themselves had a mind to do; that is, they would go on to worship the moon, here called *the queen of heaven*; yet some understand it of the sun, which was much worshipped in Egypt (ch. xliii. 13) and had been so at Jerusalem (2 Kings xxiii. 11), and they say that the Hebrew word for the sun being feminine it may not unfitly be called *the queen of heaven*. And others understand it of all the *host of heaven*, or *the frame of heaven*, the whole machine, ch. vii. 18. These daring sinners do not now go about to make excuses for their refusal to obey, nor suggest that Jeremiah spoke from himself and not from God (as before, ch. xliii. 2), but they own that he spoke to them in the name of the Lord, and yet tell him flatly, in so many words, "*We will not hearken unto thee; we will do that which is forbidden and run the hazard of that which is threatened.*" Note, Those that live in disobedience to God commonly grow worse and worse, and the heart is more and more hardened by the *deceitfulness of sin*. Here is the genuine language of the rebellious heart: *We will certainly do whatsoever thing goes forth out of our own mouth*, let God and his prophets say what they please to the contrary. What they said many think who yet have not arrived at such a degree of impudence as to speak it out. It is that which the young man would be at in the days of his youth; he would walk in the way of his heart and the sight of his eyes, and would have and do every thing he has a mind to, Eccl. xi. 9.

2. They give some sort of reasons for their resolution; for the most absurd and unreasonably wicked men will have something to say for themselves, till the day comes when *every mouth shall be stopped*.

(1.) They plead many of those things which the advocates for Rome make the marks of a true church, and not only justify but magnify themselves with; and these Jews have as much right to them as the Romanists have. [1.] They plead antiquity: We are resolved to burn incense to the queen of heaven, for our fathers did so; it is a practice that pleads prescription; and why should we pretend to be wiser than our fathers? [2.] They plead authority. Those that had power practised it themselves and prescribed it to others: *Our kings and our princes did*

it, whom God set over us, and who were of the seed of David. [3.] They plead unity. It was not here and there one that did it, but we, we all with one consent, we that are a great multitude (v. 15), we did it. [4.] They plead universality. It was not done here and there, but in the cities of Judah. [5.] They plead visibility. It was not done in a corner, in dark and shady groves only, but in the streets, openly and publicly. [6.] They plead that it was the practice of the mother-church, the holy see; it was not now learned first in Egypt, but it had been done in Jerusalem. [7.] They plead prosperity: *Then had we plenty of bread, and of all good things; we were well and saw no evil.* All the former pleas, I fear, were too true in fact; God's witnesses against their idolatry were few and hid; Elijah thought that he was left alone: and this last might perhaps be true as to some particular persons, but, as to their nation, they were still under rebukes for their rebellions, and there was no peace to those that went out or came in, 2 Chron. xv. 5. But, supposing all to be true, yet this does not at all excuse them from idolatry; it is the law of God that we must be ruled and judged by, not the practice of men.

(2.) They suggest that the judgments they had of late been under were brought upon them for leaving off to burn incense to the queen of heaven, v. 18. So perversely did they misconstrue providence, though God, by his prophets, had so often explained it to them, and the thing itself spoke the direct contrary. Since we forsook our idolatries we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword, the true reason of which was because they still retained their idols in their heart and an affection to their old sins; but they would have it thought that it was because they had forsaken the acts of sin. Thus the afflictions which should have been for their welfare, to separate between them and their sins, being misinterpreted, did but confirm them in their sins. Thus, in the first ages of Christianity, when God chastised the nations by any public calamities for opposing the Christians and persecuting them, they put a contrary sense upon the calamities, as if they were sent to punish them for conniving at the Christians and tolerating them, and cried, *Christianos ad leones—Throw the Christians to the lions.* Yet, if it had been true, as they said here, that since they returned to the service of the true God, the God of Israel, they had been in want and trouble, was that a reason why they should revolt from him again? That was as much as to say that they served not him, but their own bellies. Those who know God, and put their trust in him, will serve him, though he starve them, though he slay them, though they never see a good day with him in this world, being well assured that they shall not lose by him in the end.

(3.) They plead that, though the women were most forward and active in their idolatries, yet they did it with the consent and approbation of their husbands; the women were busy to make cakes for meat-offerings to the queen of heaven and to prepare and pour out the drink-offerings, v. 19. We found, before, that this was their work, ch. vii. 18. "But did we do it without our husbands, privately and unknown to them, so as to give them occasion to be jealous of us? No; the fathers kindled the fire while the women kneaded the dough; the men that were our heads, whom we were bound to learn of and to be obedient to, taught us to do it by their example." Note, It is sad when those who are in the nearest relation to each other, who should quicken each other to that which is good and so help one another to heaven, harden each other in sin and so ripen one another for hell. Some understand this as spoken by the husbands (v. 15), who plead that they did not do it without their men, that is, without their elders and rulers, their great men, and men in authority; but, because the making of the cakes and the pouring out of the drink-offerings are expressly spoken of as the women's work (ch. vii. 18), it seems rather to be understood as their plea: but it was a frivolous plea. What would it avail them to be able to say that it was according to their husbands' mind, when they knew that it was contrary to their God's mind?

20 Then Jeremiah said unto all the people, to the men, and to the women, and to all the people which had given him that answer, saying, 21 The incense that ye burned in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, ye, and your fathers, your kings, and your princes, and the people of the land, did not the LORD remember them, and came it not into his mind? 22 So that the LORD could no longer bear, because of the evil of your doings, and because of the abominations which ye have committed; therefore is your land a desolation, and an astonishment, and a curse, without an inhabitant, as at this day. 23 Because ye have burned incense, and because ye have sinned against the LORD, and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD, nor walked in his law, nor in his statutes, nor in his testimonies; therefore this evil is happened unto you, as at this day. 24 Moreover Jeremiah said unto all the people, and to all the women, Hear the word of the



LORD, all Judah that *are* in the land of Egypt: 25 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, saying; Ye and your wives have both spoken with your mouths, and fulfilled with your hand, saying, We will surely perform our vows that we have vowed, to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings unto her: ye will surely accomplish your vows, and surely perform your vows. 26 Therefore hear ye the word of the LORD, all Judah that dwell in the land of Egypt; Behold, I have sworn by my great name, saith the LORD, that my name shall no more be named in the mouth of any man of Judah in all the land of Egypt, saying, The Lord God liveth. 27 Behold, I will watch over them for evil, and not for good: and all the men of Judah that *are* in the land of Egypt shall be consumed by the sword and by the famine, until there be an end of them. 28 Yet a small number that escape the sword shall return out of the land of Egypt into the land of Judah, and all the remnant of Judah, that are gone into the land of Egypt to sojourn there, shall know whose words shall stand, mine, or their's. 29 And this *shall be* a sign unto you, saith the LORD, that I will punish you in this place, that ye may know that my words shall surely stand against you for evil: 30 Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will give Pharaoh-hophra king of Egypt into the hand of his enemies, and into the hand of them that seek his life; as I gave Zedekiah king of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, his enemy, and that sought his life.

Daring sinners may speak many a bold word and many a big word, but, after all, God will have the last word; for he will be justified when he speaks, and all flesh, even the proudest, shall be silent before him. Prophets may be run down, but God cannot; nay, here the prophet would not.

I. Jeremiah has something to say to them from himself, which he could say without a spirit of prophecy, and that was to rectify their mistake (a wilful mistake it was) concerning the calamities they had been under and the true intent and meaning of them.

They said that these miseries came upon them because they had now *left off burning incense to the queen of heaven*. "No," says he, "it was because you had formerly done it, not because you had now left it off." When they gave him that answer, he immediately replied (v. 20) that the incense which they and their fathers had burnt to other gods did indeed go unpunished a great while, for God was long-suffering towards them, and during the day of his patience it was perhaps, as they said, *well with them*, and they *saw no evil*; but at length they grew so provoking that *the Lord could no longer bear* (v. 22), but began a controversy with them, whereupon some of them did a little reform; their sins left them, for so it might be said, rather than that they left their sins. But their old guilt being still upon the score, and their corrupt inclinations still the same, God remembered against them the idolatries of their fathers, their kings, and their princes, in the streets of Jerusalem, which they, instead of being ashamed of, gloried in as a justification of them in their idolatries; they *all came into his mind* (v. 21), all the *abominations which they had committed* (v. 22) and all their disobedience to the *voice of the Lord* (v. 23), all were brought to account; and therefore, to punish them for these, *is their land a desolation and a curse, as at this day* (v. 22); therefore, not for their late reformation, but for their old transgressions, has all *this evil happened to them, as at this day*, v. 23. Note, The right understanding of the cause of our troubles, one would think, should go far towards the cure of our sins. Whatever evil comes upon us, it is *because we have sinned against the Lord*, and should therefore stand in awe and sin not.

II. Jeremiah has something to say to them, to the women particularly, from the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel. They have given their answer; now let them hear God's reply, v. 24. *Judah, that dwells in the land of Egypt*, has God speaking to them, even there; that is their privilege. Let them observe what he says; that is their duty, v. 26. Now God, in his reply, tells them plainly,

1. That, since they were fully determined to persist in their idolatry, he was fully determined to proceed in his controversy with them; if they would go on to provoke him, he would go on to punish them, and *see* which would get the better at last. God repeats what they had said (v. 25): "Ye and your wives are agreed in this obstinacy; you have spoken with your mouths and fulfilled with your hands; you have said it, and you stand to it, have said it and go on to do accordingly, *We will surely perform our vows that we have vowed, to burn incense to the queen of heaven*," as if, though it were a sin, yet their having vowed to do it were sufficient to justify them in the doing of it;

whereas no man can by his vow make that lawful to himself, much less duty, which God has already made sin. "Well" (says God), "*you will accomplish, you will perform, your wicked vows: now hear what is my vow, what I have sworn by my great name;*" and, if *the Lord hath sworn, he will not repent*, since they have sworn and will not repent. *With the froward he will show himself froward*, Ps. xviii. 26. (1.)

He had sworn that what little remains of religion there were among them should be lost, v. 26. Though they joined with the Egyptians in their idolatries, yet they continued upon many occasions to make mention of the name of Jehovah, particularly in their solemn oaths; they said, *Jehovah liveth*, he is *the living God*, so they owned him to be, though they worshipped dead idols; they swear, *The Lord liveth* (ch. v. 2), but I fear they retained this form of swearing more in honour of their nation than of their God. But God declares that *his name shall no more be thus named by any man of Judah in all the land of Egypt*; that is, there shall be no Jews remaining to use this dialect of their country, or, if there be, they shall have forgotten it and shall learn to swear, as the Egyptians do, *by the life of Pharaoh*, not of Jehovah. Note, Those are very miserable whom God has so far left to themselves that they have quite forgotten their religion and lost all the remains of their good education. Or this may intimate that God would take it as an affront to him, and would resent it accordingly, if they did make mention of his name and profess any relation to him. (2.) He hath sworn that what little remnant of people there was there should all be consumed (v. 27): *I will watch over them for evil; no opportunity shall be let slip to bring some judgment upon them, until there be an end of them and they be quite rooted out*. Note, To those whom God finds impenitent sinners he will be found an implacable Judge. And, when it comes to this, *they shall know* (v. 28) *whose word shall stand, mine or theirs*. They said that they should recover themselves when they returned to worship *the queen of heaven*; God said they should ruin themselves; and now the event will show which was in the right. The contest between God and sinners is whose word shall stand, whose will shall be done, who shall get the better. Sinners say that they shall have peace though they go on; God says they shall have no peace. But *when God judges he will overcome*; God's word shall stand, and not the sinner's.

2. He tells them that a very few of them should *escape the sword*, and in process of time *return into the land of Judah, a small number* (v. 28), next to none, in comparison with the great numbers that should return out of the land of the Chaldeans. This seems designed to upbraid those who boasted of their numbers that concurred in sin;

there were none to speak of that did not join in idolatry: "Well," says God, "and there shall be as few that shall escape the sword and famine."

3. He gives them a sign that all these threatenings shall be accomplished in their season, that they shall be consumed here in Egypt and shall quite perish: *Pharaoh-hophra, the present king of Egypt, shall be delivered into the hand of his enemies that seek his life—of his own rebellious subjects* (so some) under Amasis, who usurped his throne—*of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon* (so others), who invaded his kingdom; the former is related by Herodotus, the latter by Josephus. It is likely that this Pharaoh had tempted the Jews to idolatry by promises of his favour; however, they depended upon him for his protection, and it would be more than a presage of their ruin, it would be a step towards it, if he were gone. They expected more from him than from Zedekiah king of Judah; he was a more potent and politic prince. "But," says God, "*I will give him into the hand of his enemies, as I gave Zedekiah.*" Note, Those creature-comforts and confidences that we promise ourselves most from may fail us as soon as those that we promise ourselves least from, for they are all what God makes them, not what we fancy them.

The sacred history records not the accomplishment of this prophecy, but its silence is sufficient; we hear no more of these Jews in Egypt, and therefore conclude them, according to this prediction, lost there; for no word of God shall fall to the ground.

#### CHAP. XLV.

The prophecy we have in this chapter concerns Baruch only, yet is intended for the support and encouragement of all the Lord's people that serve him faithfully and keep closely to him in difficult trying times. It is placed here after the story of the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews, but was delivered long before, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, as was the prophecy in the next chapter, and probably those that follow. We here find, I. How Baruch was terrified when he was brought into trouble for writing and reading Jeremiah's roll, ver. 1—3. II. How his fears were checked with a reproof for his great expectations and silenced with a promise of special preservation, ver. 4, 5. Though Baruch was only Jeremiah's scribe, yet this notice is taken of his frights, and this provision made for his comfort; for God despises not any of his servants, but graciously concerns himself for the meekest and weakest, for Baruch the scribe as well as for Jeremiah the prophet.

THE word that Jeremiah the prophet spake unto Baruch the son of Neriah, when he had written these words in a book at the mouth of Jeremiah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, saying, 2 Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, unto thee, O Baruch; 3 Thou didst say, Woe is me now! for the Lord hath added grief to my sorrow: I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest. 4 Thus shalt thou say unto him, The Lord saith thus; Behold, *that which I have built will*



I break down, and that which I have planted I will pluck up, even this whole land. 5 And seekest thou great things for thyself? seek *them* not: for, behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh, saith the LORD: but thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places whither thou goest.

How Baruch was employed in writing Jeremiah's prophecies, and reading them, we had an account *ch. xxxvi.*, and how he was threatened for it by the king, warrants being out for him and he forced to abscond, and how narrowly he escaped under a divine protection, to which story this chapter should have been subjoined, but that, having reference to a private person, it is here thrown into the latter end of the book, as St. Paul's epistle to Philemon is put after his other epistles. Observe,

I. The consternation that poor Baruch was in when he was sought for by the king's messengers and obliged to hide his head, and the notice which God took of it. He cried out, *Woe is me now!* *v. 3.* He was a young man setting out in the world; he was well affected to the things of God, and was willing to serve God and his prophet; but, when it came to suffering, he was desirous to be excused. Being an ingenious man, and a scholar, he stood fair for preferment, and now to be driven into a corner, and in danger of a prison, or worse, was a great disappointment to him. When he read the roll publicly he hoped to gain reputation by it, that it would make him to be taken notice of and employed; but when he found that, instead of that, it exposed him to contempt, and brought him into disgrace, he cried out, "I am undone; I shall fall into the pursuers' hands, and be imprisoned, and put to death, or banished: *The Lord has added grief to my sorrow*, has loaded me with one trouble after another. After the grief of writing and reading the prophecies of my country's ruin, I have the sorrow of being treated as a criminal for so doing; and, though another might make nothing of this, yet for my part I cannot bear it; it is a burden too heavy for me. *I fainted in my sighing* (or *I am faint with my sighing*; it just kills me) *and I find no rest*, no satisfaction in my own mind. I cannot compose myself as I should and would to bear it, nor have I any prospect of relief or comfort." Baruch was a good man, but, we must say, this was his infirmity. Note, 1. Young beginners in religion, like fresh-water soldiers, are apt to be discouraged with the little difficulties which they commonly meet with at first in the service of God. They do but *run with the footmen*, and it *wearies them*; they *faint* upon the very dawning of the day of adversity, and it is an evidence that *their strength is small* (Prov. xxiv. 10), that their

faith is weak, and that they are yet but babes, who cry for every hurt and every fright. 2. Some of the best and dearest of God's saints and servants, when they have seen storms rising, have been in frights, and apt to make the worst of things, and to disquiet themselves with melancholy apprehensions more than there was cause for. 3. God takes notice of the frets and discontents of his people and is displeased with them. Baruch should have rejoiced that he was counted worthy to suffer in such a good cause and with such good company, but, instead of that, he is vexed at it, and blames his lot, nay, and reflects upon his God, as if he had dealt hardly with him; what he said was spoken in a heat and passion, but God was offended, as he was with Moses, who paid dearly for it, when, his spirit being provoked, he *spoke unadvisedly with his lips*. *Thou didst say* so and so, and it was not well said. God keeps account what we say, even when we speak in haste.

II. The reproof that God gave him for talking at this rate. Jeremiah was troubled to see him in such an agitation, and knew not well what to say to him. He was loth to chide him, and yet thought he deserved it, was willing to comfort him, and yet knew not which way to go about it; but God tells him what he *shall say to him*, *v. 4.* Jeremiah could not be certain what was at the bottom of these complaints and fears, but God sees it. They came from his corruptions. That the hurt might therefore not be healed slightly, he searches the wound, and shows him that he had raised his expectations too high in this world and had promised himself too much from it, and that made the distress and trouble he was in so very grievous to him and so hard to be borne. Note, The frowns of the world would not disquiet us as they do if we did not foolishly flatter ourselves with the hopes of its smiles and court and covet them too much. It is our over-fondness for the good things of this present time that makes us impatient under its evil things. Now God shows him that it was his fault and folly, at this time of day especially, either to desire or to look for an abundance of the wealth and honour of this world. For, 1. The ship was sinking. Ruin was coming upon the Jewish nation, an utter and universal ruin. "That which I have built, to be a house for myself, I am breaking down, and that which I have planted, to be a vineyard for myself, I am plucking up, even this whole land, the Jewish church and state; and dost thou now seek great things for thyself? Dost thou expect to be rich and honourable and to make a figure now? No." 2. "It is absurd for thee to be now painting thy own cabin. Canst thou expect to be high when all are brought low, to be full when all about thee are empty?" To seek ourselves more than the public welfare, especially to seek great

things to ourselves when the public is in danger, is very unbecoming Israelites. We may apply it to this world, and our state in it; God in his providence is breaking down and pulling up; every thing is uncertain and perishing; we cannot expect any continuing city here. What folly is it then to *seek great things for ourselves* here, where every thing is little and nothing certain!

III. The encouragement that God gave him to hope that though he should not be great, yet he should be safe: "*I will bring evil upon all flesh*, all nations of men, all orders and degrees of men, *but thy life will I give to thee for a prey*" (thy soul, so the word is) "*in all places whither thou goest*. Thou must expect to be hurried from place to place, and, wherever thou goest, to be in danger, but thou shalt escape, though often very narrowly, shalt have thy life, but it shall be as a prey, which is got with much difficulty and danger; thou shalt be saved as by fire." Note, The preservation and continuance of life are very great mercies, and we are bound to account them such, as they are the prolonging of our opportunity to glorify God in this world and to get ready for a better; and at some times, especially when the arrows of death fly thickly about us, life is a signal favour, and what we ought to be very thankful for, and while we have it must not complain though we be disappointed of the great things we expected. *Is not the life more than meat?*

## CHAP. XLVI.

How judgment began at the house of God we have found in the foregoing prophecy and history; but now we shall find that it did not end there. In this and the following chapters we have predictions of the desolations of the neighbouring nations, and these brought upon them too mostly by the king of Babylon, till at length Babylon itself comes to be reckoned with. The prophecy against Egypt is here put first and takes up this whole chapter, in which we have, I. A prophecy of the defeat of Pharaoh-necho's army by the Chaldean forces at Carchemish, which was accomplished soon after, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, ver. 1-12. II. A prophecy of the descent which Nebuchadnezzar should make upon the land of Egypt, and his success in it, which was accomplished some years after the destruction of Jerusalem, ver. 13-26. III. A word of comfort to the Israel of God in the midst of those calamities, ver. 27, 28.

**T**HE word of the Lord which came to Jeremiah the prophet against the Gentiles; 2 Against Egypt, against the army of Pharaoh-necho king of Egypt, which was by the river Euphrates in Carchemish, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon smote in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah. 3 Order ye the buckler and shield, and draw near to battle. 4 Harness the horses; and get up, ye horsemen, and stand forth with *your* helmets; furbish the spears, *and* put on the brigandines. 5 Wherefore have I seen them dismayed and turned away back? and their mighty ones are beaten down,

and are fled apace, and look not back: *for fear was round about*, saith the Lord. 6 Let not the swift flee away, nor the mighty man escape; they shall stumble, and fall towards the north by the river Euphrates. 7 Who is this that cometh up as a flood, whose waters are moved as the rivers? 8 Egypt riseth up like a flood, and *his* waters are moved like the rivers; and he saith, I will go up, *and* will cover the earth; I will destroy the city and the inhabitants thereof. 9 Come up, ye horses; and rage, ye chariots; and let the mighty men come forth; the Ethiopians and the Libyans, that handle the shield; and the Lydians, that handle *and* bend the bow. 10 For this *is* the day of the Lord God of hosts, a day of vengeance, that he may avenge him of his adversaries: and the sword shall devour, and it shall be satiate and made drunk with their blood: for the Lord God of hosts hath a sacrifice in the north country by the river Euphrates. 11 Go up into Gilead, and take balm, O virgin, the daughter of Egypt: in vain shalt thou use many medicines; *for* thou shalt not be cured. 12 The nations have heard of thy shame, and thy cry hath filled the land: for the mighty man hath stumbled against the mighty, *and* they are fallen both together.

The first verse is the title of that part of this book which relates to the neighbouring nations, and follows here. It is *the word of the Lord which came to Jeremiah against the Gentiles*; for God is King and Judge of nations, knows and will call to an account those who know him not nor take any notice of him. Both Isaiah and Ezekiel prophesied against these nations that Jeremiah here has a separate saying to, and with reference to the same events. In the Old Testament we have *the word of the Lord against the Gentiles*; in the New Testament we have *the word of the Lord for the Gentiles*, that those who were *afar off* are made nigh.

He begins with Egypt, because they were of old Israel's oppressors and of late their deceivers, when they put confidence in them. In these verses he foretels the overthrow of *the army of Pharaoh-necho*, by Nebuchadnezzar, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, which was so complete a victory to the king of Babylon that thereby he recovered from the river of Egypt to the river Euphrates, all



that pertained to the king of Egypt, and so weakened him that he came not again any more out of his land (as we find, 2 Kings xxiv. 7), and so made him pay dearly for his expedition against the king of Assyria four years before, in which he slew Josiah, 2 Kings xxiii. 29. This is the event that is here foretold in lofty expressions of triumph over Egypt thus foiled, which Jeremiah would speak of with a particular pleasure, because the death of Josiah, which he had lamented, was now avenged on Pharaoh-necho. Now here,

I. The Egyptians are upbraided with the mighty preparations they made for this expedition, in which the prophet calls to them to do their utmost, for so they would: "Come then, *order the buckler*, let the weapons of war be got ready," v. 3. Egypt was famous for *horses*—let them be *harnessed* and the cavalry well mounted: *Get up, you horsemen, and stand forth*, &c., v. 4. See what preparations the children of men make, with abundance of care and trouble and at a vast expense, to kill one another, as if they did not die fast enough of themselves. He compares their marching out upon this expedition to the rising of their river Nile (c. 7, 8). *Egypt now rises up like a flood*, scorning to keep within its own banks and threatening to overflow all the neighbouring lands. It is a very formidable army that the Egyptians bring into the field upon this occasion. The prophet summons them (v. 9): *Come up, you horses; rage, you chariots*. He challenges them to bring all their confederate troops together, *the Ethiopians*, that descended from the same stock with the Egyptians (Gen. x. 6), and were their neighbours and allies, *the Libyans and Lydians*, both seated in Africa, to the west of Egypt, and from them the Egyptians fetched their auxiliary forces. Let them strengthen themselves with all the art and interest they have, yet it shall be all in vain; they shall be shamefully defeated notwithstanding, for God will fight against them, and against him *there is no wisdom nor counsel*, Prov. xxi. 30, 31. It concerns those that go forth to war not only to *order the buckler*, and *harness the horses*, but to repent of their sins, and pray to God for his presence with them, and that they may have it to keep themselves from every wicked thing.

II. They are upbraided with the great expectations they had from this expedition, which were quite contrary to what God intended in bringing them together. They knew their own thoughts, and God knew them, and sat in heaven and laughed at them; *but they knew not the thoughts of the Lord, for he gathers them as sheaves into the floor*, Mic. iv. 11, 12. Egypt saith (v. 8): *I will go up; I will cover the earth, and none shall hinder me; I will destroy the city*, whatever city it is that stands in my way. Like Pharaoh of old, *I will pursue, I will*

*overtake*. The Egyptians say that they shall have a day of it, but God saith that it shall be his day: *This is the day of the Lord God of hosts* (v. 10), the day in which he will be exalted in the overthrow of the Egyptians. They meant one thing, but God meant another; they designed it for the advancement of their dignity and the enlargement of their dominion, but God designed it for the great abasement and weakening of their kingdom. It is a *day of vengeance* for Josiah's death; it is a day of sacrifice to divine justice, to which multitudes of the sinners of Egypt shall fall as victims. Note, When men think to magnify themselves by pushing on unrighteous enterprises, let them expect that God will glorify himself by blasting them and cutting them off.

III. They are upbraided with their cowardice and inglorious flight when they come to an engagement (v. 5, 6): "*Wherefore have I seen them*, notwithstanding all these mighty and vast preparations and all these expressions of bravery and resolution, when the Chaldean army faces them, *dismayed, turned back*, quite disheartened, and no spirit left in them." 1. They make a shameful retreat. *Even their mighty ones*, who, one would think, should have stood their ground, *flee a flight*, flee by consent, make the best of their way, flee in confusion and with the utmost precipitation; they have neither time nor heart to *look back*, but *fear is round about them*, for they apprehend it so. And yet, 2. They cannot make their escape. They have the shame of flying, and yet not the satisfaction of saving themselves by flight; they might as well have stood their ground and died upon the spot; for even *the swift shall not flee away*. The lightness of their heels shall fail them when it comes to the trial, as well as the stoutness of their hearts; the *mighty shall not escape*, nay, *they are beaten down and broken to pieces*. *They shall stumble in their flight, and fall towards the north*, towards their enemy's country; for such confusion were they in when they took to their feet that instead of making homeward, as men usually do in that case, they made forward. Note, *The race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong*. Valiant men are not always victorious.

IV. They are upbraided with their utter inability ever to recover this blow, which should be fatal to their nation, c. 11, 12. The damsel, *the daughter of Egypt*, that lived in great pomp and state, is sorely wounded by this defeat. Let her now seek for *balm in Gilead* and physicians there; let her use all the medicines her wise men can prescribe for the healing of this hurt, and the repairing of the loss sustained by this defeat; but all in vain; *no cure shall be to them*; they shall never be able to bring such a powerful army as this into the field again. "*The nations that rang of thy glory and strength have now heard of thy shame*, how shamefully thou

wast routed and how thou art weakened by it." It needs not be spread by the triumphs of the conquerors, the shrieks and outcries of the conquered will proclaim it: *Thy cry hath filled the country about.* For, when they fled several ways, one *mighty man* stumbled upon another and dashed against another, such confusion were they in, so that *both together* became a prey to the pursuers, an easy prey. A thousand such dreadful accidents there should be, which should fill the country with the cry of those that were overcome. *Let not the mighty man* therefore *glory in his might*, for the time may come when it will stand him in no stead.

13 The word that the LORD spake to Jeremiah the prophet, how Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon should come *and* smite the land of Egypt. 14 Declare ye in Egypt, and publish in Migdol, and publish in Noph and in Tahpanhes: say ye, Stand fast, and prepare thee; for the sword shall devour round about thee. 15 Why are thy valiant *men* swept away? they stood not, because the LORD did drive them. 16 He made many to fall, yea, one fell upon another: and they said, Arise, and let us go again to our own people, and to the land of our nativity, from the oppressing sword. 17 They did cry theré, Pharaoh king of Egypt *is but* a noise; he hath passed the time appointed. 18 *As* I live, saith the king, whose name *is* the LORD of hosts, Surely as Tabor *is* among the mountains, and as Carmel by the sea, *so* shall he come. 19 O thou daughter dwelling in Egypt, furnish thyself to go into captivity: for Noph shall be waste and desolate without an inhabitant. 20 Egypt *is like* a very fair heifer, *but* destruction cometh; it cometh out of the north. 21 Also her hired men *are* in the midst of her like fatted bullocks; for they also are turned back, *and* are fled away together: they did not stand, because the day of their calamity was come upon them, *and* the time of their visitation. 22 The voice thereof shall go like a serpent; for they shall march with an army, and come against her with axes, as hewers of wood. 23 They shall cut down her forest, saith the LORD, though it cannot be searched; because

they are more than the grasshoppers, and *are* innumerable. 24 The daughter of Egypt shall be confounded; she shall be delivered into the hand of the people of the north. 25 The LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, saith; Behold, I will punish the multitude of No, and Pharaoh, and Egypt, with their gods, and their kings; even Pharaoh, and *all* them that trust in him: 26 And I will deliver them into the hand of those that seek their lives, and into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of his servants: and afterward it shall be inhabited, as in the days of old, saith the LORD. 27 But fear not thou, O my servant Jacob, and be not dismayed, O Israel: for, behold, I will save thee from afar off, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and be in rest and at ease, and none shall make *him* afraid. 28 Fear thou not, O Jacob my servant, saith the LORD: for I *am* with thee; for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have driven thee: but I will not make a full end of thee, but correct thee in measure; yet will I not leave thee wholly unpunished.

In these verses we have,

I. Confusion and terror spoken to Egypt. The accomplishment of the prediction in the former part of the chapter disabled the Egyptians from making any attempts upon other nations; for what could they do when their army was routed? But still they remained strong at home, and none of their neighbours durst make any attempts upon them. Though the kings of Egypt came no more *out of their land* (2 Kings xxiv. 7), yet they kept safe and easy in their land; and what would they desire more than peaceably to enjoy their own? One would think all men should be content to do this, and not covet to invade their neighbours. But the measure of Egypt's iniquity is full, and now they shall not long enjoy their own; those that encroached on others shall now be themselves encroached on. The scope of the prophecy here is to show *how the king of Babylon should shortly come and smite the land of Egypt*, and bring the war into their own bosoms which they had formerly carried into his borders, v. 13. This was fulfilled by the same hand with the former, even Nebuchadrezzar's, but many years after, twenty at least, and probably the prediction of it was long after the former prediction,



and perhaps much about the same time with that other prediction of the same event which we had *ch. xliii. 10.*

1. Here is the alarm of war sounded in Egypt, to their great amazement (*v. 14*), notice given to the country that the enemy is approaching, *the sword is devouring round about in the neighbouring countries*, and therefore it is time for the Egyptians to put themselves in a posture of defence, to prepare for war, that they may give the enemy a warm reception. This must be proclaimed in all parts of Egypt, particularly in Migdol, Noph, and Tahpanhes, because in these places especially the Jewish refugees, or fugitives rather, had planted themselves, in contempt of God's command (*ch. xliv. 1*), and let them hear what a sorry shelter Egypt is likely to be to them.

2. The retreat hereupon of the forces of other nations which the Egyptians had in their pay is here foretold. Some considerable number of those troops, it is probable, were posted upon the frontiers to guard them, where they were beaten off by the invaders and put to flight. Then were the *valiant men swept away* (*v. 15*) as with a *sweeping rain* (it is the word that is used *Prov. xxviii. 3*); they can none of them stand their ground, *because the Lord drives them* from their respective posts; he drives them by his terrors; he drives them by enabling the Chaldeans to drive them. It is not possible that those should fix whom the wrath of God chases. He it was (*v. 16*) that *made many to fall, yea, when their day shall come to fall, the enemy needs not throw them down, they shall fall one upon another*, every man shall be a stumbling-block to his fellow, to his follower; nay, if God please, *they shall be made to fall upon one another, every man's sword shall be against his fellow. Her hired men*, the troops Egypt has in her service, are indeed *in the midst of her like fatted bullocks*, lusty men, able bodied and high spirited, who were likely for action and promised to make their part good against the enemy; but *they are turned back*; their hearts failed them, and, instead of fighting, they have *fled away together*. How could they withstand their fate when *the day of their calamity had come*, the day in which God will visit them in wrath? Some think they are compared to fatted bullocks for their luxury; they had wanted in pleasures, so that they were very unfit for hardships, and therefore turned back and could not stand. In this consternation, (1.) They all made homeward towards their own country (*v. 16*): *They said, "Arise, and let us go again to our own people, where we may be safe from the oppressing sword of the Chaldeans, that bears down all before it."* In times of exigence little confidence is to be put in mercenary troops, that fight purely for pay, and have no interest in theirs whom they fight for. (2.) They exclaimed vehemently against

Pharaoh, to whose cowardice or bad management, it is probable, their defeat was owing. When he posted them there upon the borders of his country it is probable that he told them he would within such a time come himself with a gallant army of his own subjects to support them; but he failed them, and, when the enemy advanced, they found they had none to back them, so that they were perfectly abandoned to the fury of the invaders. No marvel then that they quitted their post and deserted the service, crying out, *Pharaoh king of Egypt is but a noise* (*v. 17*); he can hector, and talk big of the mighty things he would do, but that is all; he brings nothing to pass. All his promises to those in alliance with him, or that are employed for him, vanish into smoke. He brings not the succours he engaged to bring, or not till it is too late: *He has passed the time appointed*; he did not keep his word, nor keep his day, and therefore they bid him farewell, they will never serve under him any more. Note, Those that make most noise in any business are frequently but a noise. Great talkers are little doers.

3. The formidable power of the Chaldean army is here described as bearing down all before it. *The King of kings, whose name is the Lord of hosts*, and before whom the mightiest kings on earth, though gods to us, are but as grasshoppers, he hath said it, he hath sworn it, *As I live, saith this King, as Tabor overtops the mountains and Carmel overlooks the sea, so shall the king of Babylon overpower all the force of Egypt*, such a command shall he have, such a sway shall he bear, *v. 18*. He and his army shall come *against Egypt with axes, as hewers of wood* (*v. 22*), and the Egyptians shall be no more able to resist them than the tree is to resist the man that comes with an axe to cut it down; so that Egypt shall be felled as a forest is by the hewers of wood, which (if there be many of them, and those well provided with instruments for the purpose) will be done in a little time. Egypt is very populous, full of towns and cities, like a forest, the trees of which cannot be searched or numbered, and very rich, full of hidden treasures, many of which will escape the searching eye of the Chaldean soldiers; but they shall make a great spoil in the country, for *they are more than the locusts*, that come in vast swarms and overrun a country, devouring every green thing (*Joel i. 6, 7*), so shall the Chaldeans do, for *they are innumerable*. Note, The Lord of hosts hath numberless hosts at his command.

4. The desolation of Egypt hereby is foretold, and the waste that should be made of that rich country. *Egypt is now like a very fair heifer, or calf* (*v. 20*), fat and shining, and not accustomed to the yoke of subjection, wanton as a heifer that is well fed, and very sportful. Some think here is an allusion to Apis, the bull or calf which the

Egyptians worshipped, from whom the children of Israel learned to worship the golden calf. Egypt is as fair as a goddess, and adores herself, *but destruction comes; cutting up comes* (so some read it); *it comes out of the north*; thence the Chaldean soldiers shall come, as so many butchers or sacrificers, to kill and cut up this *fair heifer*. (1.) The Egyptians shall be brought down, shall be tamed, and their tune changed: *The daughters of Egypt shall be confounded* (v. 24), shall be filled with astonishment. *Their voice shall go like a serpent*, that is, it shall be very low and submissive; they shall not low like a fair heifer, that makes a great noise, but hiss out of their holes like serpents. They shall not dare to make loud complaints of the cruelty of the conquerors, but vent their griefs in silent murmurs. They shall not now, as they used to do, answer roughly, but, *with the poor, use entreaties and beg for their lives*. (2.) They shall be carried away prisoners into their enemy's land (v. 19): "*O thou daughter! dwelling securely and delicately in Egypt, that fruitful pleasant country, do not think this will last always, but furnish thyself to go into captivity; instead of rich clothes, which will but tempt the enemy to strip thee, get plain and warm clothes; instead of fine shoes, provide strong ones; and inure thyself to hardship, that thou mayest bear it the better.*" Note, It concerns us, among all our preparations, to prepare for trouble. We provide for the entertainment of our friends, let us not neglect to provide for the entertainment of our enemies, nor among all our furniture omit furniture for captivity. The Egyptians must prepare to flee; for their cities shall be evacuated. Noph particularly *shall be desolate, without an inhabitant*, so general shall the slaughter and the captivity be. There are some penalties which, we say, the king and the multitude are exempted from, but here even these are obnoxious: *The multitude of No shall be punished*: it is called *populous No*, Nah. iii. 8. *Though hand join in hand, yet they shall not escape; nor can any think to go off in the crowd*. Be they ever so many, they shall find God will be too many for them. Their kings and all their petty princes shall fall; and their gods too (ch. xliii. 12, 13), their idols and their great men. Those which they call their tutelardities shall be no protection to them. Pharaoh shall be brought down, and *all those that trust in him* (v. 25), particularly the Jews that came to sojourn in his country, trusting in him rather than in God. All these shall be *delivered into the hands of the northern nations* (v. 24), into the hand not only of Nebuchadnezzar that mighty potentate, but *into the hands of his servants*, according to the curse on Ham's posterity, of which the Egyptians were, that they should be the *servants of servants*. These seek their lives, and into their hands they shall be delivered.

5. An intimation is given that in process of time Egypt shall recover itself again (v. 26): *Afterwards it shall be inhabited, shall be peopled again*, whereas by this destruction it was almost dispeopled. Ezekiel foretels that this should be at the end of forty years, Ezek. xxix. 13. See what changes the nations of the earth are subject to, how they are emptied and increased again; and let not nations that prosper be secure, nor those that for the present are in thralldom despair.

II. Comfort and peace are here spoken to the Israel of God, v. 27, 28. Some understand it of those whom the king of Egypt had carried into captivity with Jehoahaz, but we read not of any that were carried away captives with him; it may therefore rather refer to the captives in Babylon, whom God had mercy in store for, or, more generally, to all the people of God, designed for their encouragement in the most difficult times, when the judgments of God are abroad among the nations. We had these words of comfort before, ch. xxx. 10, 11. 1. Let the wicked of the earth tremble, they have cause for it; *but fear not thou, O my servant Jacob! and be not dismayed, O Israel!* and again, *Fear thou not, O Jacob!* God would not have his people to be a timorous people. 2. The wicked of the earth *shall be put away like dross*, not to be looked after any more; but God's people, in order to their being saved, shall be found out and gathered though they be far off, shall be redeemed though they be held fast in captivity, and shall return. 3. The wicked *is like the troubled sea when it cannot rest; they flee when none pursues*. But Jacob, being at home in God, *shall be at rest and at ease, and none shall make him afraid*; for *what time he is afraid he has a God to trust to*. 4. The wicked God *beholds afar off*; but, wherever thou art, *O Jacob! I am with thee, a very present help*. 5. *A full end shall be made of the nations that oppressed God's Israel, as Egypt and Babylon*; but mercy shall be kept in store for the Israel of God: they shall be corrected, but not cast off; the correction shall be in measure, in respect of degree and continuance. Nations have their periods; the Jewish nation itself has come to an end as a nation; but the gospel church, God's spiritual Israel, still continues, and will to the end of time; in that this promise is to have its full accomplishment, that, though God correct it, he will never *make a full end of it*.

#### CHAP. XLVII.

This chapter reads the Philistines their doom, as the former read the Egyptians theirs and by the same hand, that of Nebuchadnezzar. It is short, but terrible; and Tyre and Zidon, though they lay at some distance from them, come in sharers with them in the destruction here threatened. 1. It is foretold that the forces of the northern crowns should come upon them, to their great terror, ver. 1-5. 11. That the war should continue long, and their endeavour to put an end to it should be in vain, ver. 6-7.

THE word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah the prophet against



the Philistines, before that Pharaoh smote Gaza. 2 Thus saith the LORD; Behold, waters rise up out of the north, and shall be an overflowing flood, and shall overflow the land, and all that is therein; the city, and them that dwell therein: then the men shall cry, and all the inhabitants of the land shall howl. 3 At the noise of the stamping of the hoofs of his strong horses, at the rushing of his chariots, and at the rumbling of his wheels, the fathers shall not look back to their children for feebleness of hands; 4 Because of the day that cometh to spoil all the Philistines, and to cut off from Tyrus and Zidon every helper that remaineth: for the LORD will spoil the Philistines, the remnant of the country of Caphtor. 5 Baldness is come upon Gaza; Ashkelon is cut off with the remnant of their valley: how long wilt thou cut thyself? 6 O thou sword of the LORD, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? put up thyself into thy scabbard, rest, and be still. 7 How can it be quiet, seeing the LORD hath given it a charge against Ashkelon, and against the sea shore? there hath he appointed it.

As the Egyptians had often proved false friends, so the Philistines had always been sworn enemies, to the Israel of God, and the more dangerous and vexatious for their being such near neighbours to them. They were considerably humbled in David's time, but, it seems, they had got head again and were a considerable people till Nebuchadnezzar cut them off with their neighbours, which is the event here foretold. The date of this prophecy is observable; it was before Pharaoh smote Gaza. When this blow was given to Gaza by the king of Egypt is not certain, whether in his expedition against Carchemish or in his return thence, after he had slain Josiah, or when he afterwards came with design to relieve Jerusalem; but this is mentioned here to show that this word of the Lord came to Jeremiah against the Philistines when they were in their full strength and lustre, themselves and their cities in good condition, in no peril from any adversary or evil occurrent. When no disturbance of their repose was foreseen by any human probabilities, yet then Jeremiah foretold their ruin, which Pharaoh's smiting Gaza soon after would be but an earnest of, and, as it were, the beginning of sorrows to that country. It is here foretold, 1. That a

foreign enemy and a very formidable one shall be brought upon them; *Waters rise up out of the north, v. 2.* Waters sometimes signify multitudes of people and nations (Rev. xvii. 15), sometimes great and threatening calamities (Ps. lxxix. 1); here they signify both. They rise out of the north, whence fair weather and the wind that drives away rain are said to come; but now a terrible storm comes out of that cold climate. The Chaldean army shall overflow the land like a deluge. Probably this happened before the destruction of Jerusalem, for it should seem that in Gedaliah's time, which was just after, the army of the Chaldeans was quite withdrawn out of those parts. The country of the Philistines was but of small extent, so that it would soon be overwhelmed by so vast an army. 2. That they shall all be in a consternation upon it. The men shall have no heart to fight, but shall sit down and cry like children: *All the inhabitants of the land shall howl*, so that nothing but lamentation shall be heard in all places. The occasion of the fright is elegantly described, v. 3. Before it comes to killing and slaying, the very stamping of the horses and rattling of the chariots, when the enemy makes his approach, shall strike a terror upon the people, to such a degree that parents in their fright shall seem void of natural affection, *for they shall not look back to their children*, to provide for their safety, or so much as to see what becomes of them. Their hands shall be so feeble that they shall despair of carrying them off with them, and therefore they shall not care for seeing them, but leave them to take their lot; or they shall be in such a consternation that they shall quite forget even those pieces of themselves. Let none be over-fond of their children, nor dote upon them, since such distress may come that they may either wish they had none or forget that they have, and have no heart to look upon them. 3. That the country of the Philistines shall be spoiled and laid waste, and the other countries adjoining to them and in alliance with them. It is a day to spoil the Philistines, for the Lord will spoil them, v. 4. Note, Those whom God will spoil must needs be spoiled; for, if God be against them, who can be for them? Tyre and Zidon were strong and wealthy cities, and they used to help the Philistines in a strait, but now they shall themselves be involved in the common ruin, and God will cut off from them every helper that remains. Note, Those that trust to help from creatures will find it cut off when they most need it and will thereby be put into the utmost confusion. Who the remnant of the country of Caphtor were is uncertain, but we find that the Caphtorim were near akin to the Philistines (Gen. x. 14), and probably when their own country was destroyed such as remained came and settled with their kinsmen the Philistines, and were now

spoiled with them. Some particular places are here named, *Gaza, and Ashkelon*, v. 5. *Baldness has come upon them*: the invaders have stripped them of all their ornaments, or they have made themselves bald in token of extreme grief, and they are *cut off*, with the other cities that were in the plain or valley about them. The products of their fruitful valley shall be *spoiled*, and made a prey of, by the conquerors. 4. That these calamities should continue long. The prophet, in the foresight of this, with his usual tenderness, asks them first (v. 5), *How long will you cut yourselves*, as men in extreme sorrow and anguish do? O how tedious will the calamity be! not only cutting, but long cutting. But he turns from the effect to the cause: *They cut themselves*, for the sword of the Lord cuts them. And therefore, (1.) He bespeaks that to be still (v. 6): *O thou sword of the Lord! how long will it be ere thou be quiet?* He begs it would *put up itself into the scabbard*, would devour no more flesh, drink no more blood. This expresses the prophet's earnest desire to see an end of the war, looking with compassion, as became a man, even upon the Philistines themselves, when their country was made desolate by the sword. Note, War is the *sword of the Lord*: with it he punishes the crimes of his enemies and pleads the cause of his own people. When war is once begun it often lasts long; the sword, once drawn, does not quickly find the way into the scabbard again; nay, some when they draw the sword throw away the scabbard, for they *delight in war*. So deplorable are the desolations of war that the blessings of peace cannot but be very desirable. O that *swords might be beaten into ploughshares!* (2.) Yet he gives a satisfactory account of the continuance of the war and stops the mouth of his own complaint (v. 7): *How can it be quiet, seeing the Lord hath given it a charge* against such and such places, particularly specified in its commission? *There hath he appointed it.* Note, [1.] The sword of war hath its charge from the Lord of hosts. Every bullet has its charge; you call them blind bullets, but they are directed by an all-seeing God. The war itself has its charge; he saith to it, *Go, and it goes—Come, and it comes—Do this, and it does it*: for he is commander-in-chief. [2.] When the sword is drawn we cannot expect it should be sheathed till it has fulfilled its charge. As the word of God, so his rod and his sword, shall accomplish that for which he sends them.

## CHAP. XLVIII.

Moab is next set to the bar before Jeremiah the prophet, whom God had constituted judge over nations and kingdoms, from his mouth to receive its doom. Isaiah's predictions concerning Moab had had their accomplishment (we had the predictions Isa. xv. and xvi. and the like Amos ii. 1), and they were fulfilled when the Assyrians, under Salmanassar, invaded and distressed Moab. But this is a prophecy of the desolations of Moab by the Chaldeans, which were accomplished under Nebuzaradan, about five years after he had destroyed Jerusalem. Here is, I. The destruction foretold that it should be great and general, should extend itself to all parts

of the country (ver. 1–6, 8, and again ver. 21–25, 34), that spoilers should come upon them and force some to flee (ver. 9), should carry many into captivity (ver. 12, 46), that the enemy should come shortly (ver. 16), come swiftly and surprise them (ver. 40, 41), that he should make thorough work (ver. 10) and lay the country quite waste, though it was very strong (ver. 14, 15), that there should be no escaping (ver. 42, 43), that this should force them to quit their idols (ver. 13, 35) and put an end to all their joy (ver. 33, 34), that their neighbours shall lament them (ver. 17–19) and the prophet himself does, ver. 31, 35, &c. II. The causes of this destruction assigned; it was sin that brought this ruin upon them, their pride, and security, and carnal confidence (ver. 7, 11, 14, 29), and their contempt of and enmity to God and his people, ver. 25, 27, 30. III. A promise of the restoration of Moab, ver. 47

**A** GAINST Moab thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Woe unto Nebo! for it is spoiled: Kiriathaim is confounded and taken: Misgab is confounded and dismayed. 2 *There shall be no more praise of Moab*: in Heshbon they have devised evil against it; come, and let us cut it off from *being* a nation. Also thou shalt be cut down, O Madmen; the sword shall pursue thee. 3 A voice of crying *shall be* from Horonaim, spoiling and great destruction. 4 Moab is destroyed; her little ones have caused a cry to be heard. 5 For in the going up of Luhith continual weeping shall go up; for in the going down of Horonaim the enemies have heard a cry of destruction. 6 Flee, save your lives, and be like the heath in the wilderness. 7 For because thou hast trusted in thy works and in thy treasures, thou shalt also be taken: and Chemosh shall go forth into captivity *with* his priests and his princes together. 8 And the spoiler shall come upon every city, and no city shall escape: the valley also shall perish, and the plain shall be destroyed, as the LORD hath spoken. 9 Give wings unto Moab, that it may flee and get away: for the cities thereof shall be desolate, without any to dwell therein. 10 Cursed *be* he that doeth the work of the LORD deceitfully, and cursed *be* he that keepeth back his sword from blood. 11 Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity: therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed. 12 Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will send unto him wanderers, that



shall cause him to wander, and shall empty his vessels, and break their bottles. 13 And Moab shall be ashamed of Chemosh, as the house of Israel was ashamed of Beth-el their confidence.

We may observe in these verses,

I. The author of Moab's destruction; it is the *Lord of hosts*, that has armies, all armies, at his command, and the *God of Israel* (v. 1), who will herein plead the cause of his Israel against a people that have always been vexatious to them, and will punish them now for the injuries done to Israel of old, though Israel was forbidden to meddle with them (Deut. ii. 9), therefore the destruction of Moab is called *the work of the Lord* (v. 10), for it is he that pleads for Israel; and his work will exactly agree with his word, v. 8.

II. The instruments of it: *Spoilers shall come* (v. 8), shall come with a sword, a sword that shall *pursue them*, v. 2. "*I will send unto him wanderers*, such as come from afar, as if they were vagrants, or had missed their way, but they shall *cause him to wander*; they seem as wanderers themselves, but they shall make the Moabites to be really wanderers, some to flee and others to be carried into captivity." These destroyers stir up themselves to do execution; they have *devised evil against Heshbon*, one of the principal cities of Moab, and they aim at no less than the ruin of the kingdom: *Come, and let us cut it off from being a nation* (v. 2); nothing less will serve the turn of the invaders; they come, not to plunder it, but to ruin it. The prophet, in God's name, engages them to make thorough work of it (v. 10): *Cursed be he that does the work of the Lord deceitfully*, this bloody work, this destroying work; though it goes against the grain with men of compassion, yet it is *the work of the Lord*, and must not be done by the halves. The Chaldeans have it in charge, by a secret instinct (says Mr. Gataker), to destroy the Moabites, and therefore they must not spare, must not, out of foolish pity, *keep back their sword from blood*; they would thereby bring a sword, and a curse with it, upon themselves, as Saul did by sparing the Amalekites and Ahab by letting Benhadad go. *Thy life shall go for his life*. To this work is applied that general rule given to all that are employed in any service for God, *Cursed be he that does the work of the Lord deceitfully or negligently*, that pretends to do it, but does it not to purpose, makes a show of serving God's glory, but is really serving his own ends and carries on the work of the Lord no further than will suit his own purposes, or that is slothful in business for God and takes neither care nor pains to do it as it should be done, Mal. i. 14. Let not such de-

ceive themselves, for God will not thus be mocked.

III. The woeful instances and effects of this destruction. The cities shall be laid in ruins; they shall be *spoiled* (v. 1) and cut down (v. 2); they shall be *desolate* (v. 9), *without any to dwell therein*; there shall be no houses to dwell in, or no people to dwell in them, or no safety and ease to those that would dwell in them. *Every city shall be spoiled and no city shall escape*. The strongest city shall not be able to secure itself against the enemies' power, nor shall the finest city be able to recommend itself to the enemies' pity and favour. The country also shall be wasted, *the valley shall perish*, and *the plain be destroyed*, v. 8. The corn and the flocks, which used to cover the plains and make the valleys rejoice, shall all be destroyed, eaten up, trodden down, or carried off. The most sacred persons shall not escape: *The priests and princes shall go together into captivity*. Nay, Chemosh, the god they worship, who, they hope, will protect them, shall share with them in the ruin; his temples shall be laid in ashes and his image carried away with the rest of the spoil. Now the consequence of all this will be, 1. Great shame and confusion: *Kirjathaim is confounded*, and Misgah is so. They shall be ashamed of the mighty boasts they have sometimes made of their cities: *There shall be no more vaunting in Moab concerning Heshbon* (so it might be read, v. 2); they shall no more boast of the strength of that city when the evil which is designed against it is brought upon it. Nor shall they any more boast of their gods (v. 13); they shall be *ashamed of Chemosh* (ashamed of all the prayers they have made to and all the confidence they put in that dungbill deity), *as Israel was ashamed of Beth-el*, of the golden calf they had at Beth-el, which they confided in as their protector, but were deceived in, for it was not able to save them from the Assyrians; nor shall Chemosh be able to save the Moabites from the Chaldeans. Note, Those that will not be convinced and made ashamed of the folly of their idolatry by the word of God shall be convinced and made ashamed of it by the judgments of God, when they shall find by woful experience the utter inability of the gods they have served to do them any service. 2. There will be great sorrow; there is a *voice of crying* heard (v. 3) and the cry is nothing but *spoiling and great destruction*. Alas! alas! *Moab is destroyed*, v. 4. The great ones having quitted the cities to shift for their own safety, even the *little ones have caused a cry to be heard*, the meaner sort of people, or the little children, the innocent harmless ones, whose cries at such a time are the most piteous. Go up to the hills, go down to the valleys, and you meet with *continual weeping* (*weeping with weeping*); all are in tears; you meet none with dry eyes. Even

the enemies have heard the cry, from whom it would have been policy to conceal it, for they will be animated and encouraged by it; but it is so great that it cannot be hid. 3. There will be great hurry; they will cry to one another, "Away, away! flee; save your lives (v. 6); shift for your own safety with all imaginable speed, though you escape as bare and naked as the *heath*, or grig, or dry shrub, *in the wilderness*; think not of carrying away any thing you have, for it may cost you your life to attempt it, Matt. xxiv. 16—18: 'Take shelter, though it be in a barren wilderness, that you may have your lives for a prey. The danger will come suddenly and swiftly; and therefore *give wings unto Moab* (v. 9); that would be the greatest kindness you could do them; that is what they will call for, *O that we had wings like a dove!* for unless they have wings, and can fly, there will be no escaping."

IV. The sins for which God will now reckon with Moab, and which justify God in these severe proceedings against them. 1. It is because they have been secure, and have trusted in their wealth and strength, *in their works and in their treasures*, v. 7. They had taken a great deal of pains to fortify their cities and make large works about them, and to fill their exchequer and private coffers, so that they thought themselves in as good a posture for war as any people could be and that none durst invade them, and therefore set danger at defiance. They trusted in the abundance of their riches and strengthened themselves in their wickedness, Ps. lii. 7. Now, for this reason, that they may have a sensible conviction of the vanity and folly of their carnal confidences, God will send an enemy that will master their works and rife their treasures. Note, We forfeit the comfort of that creature which we repose that confidence in which should be reposed in God only. The reed will break that is leaned upon. 2. It is because they have not made a right improvement of the days of their peace and prosperity, v. 11. (1.) They had been long undisturbed: *Moab has been at ease from his youth*. It was an ancient kingdom before Israel was, and had enjoyed great tranquillity, though a small country and surrounded with potent neighbours. God's Israel were afflicted from their youth (Ps. cxix. 1, 2), but *Moab at ease from his youth*. He has not been emptied from vessel to vessel, has not known any troublesome weakening changes, but is as wine kept on the lees, and not racked or drawn off, by which it retains its strength and body. He has not been unsettled, nor any way made uneasy; he has not gone into captivity, as Israel have often done, and yet Moab is a wicked idolatrous nation, and one of the confederates against God's hidden ones, Ps. lxxxiii. 3, 6. Note, There are many that persist in unrepented iniquity and yet enjoy uninterrupted prosperity. (2.) They had

been as long corrupt and unreformed: He *has settled on his lees*; he has been secure and sensual in his prosperity, has rested in it, and fetched all the strength and life of the soul from it, as the wine from the lees. *His taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed*; he is still the same, as bad as ever he was. Note, While bad people are as happy as they used to be in the world it is no marvel if they are as bad as they used to be. They have no changes of their peace and prosperity, *therefore they fear not God*, their hearts and lives are unchanged, Ps. lv. 10.

14 How say ye, *We are mighty and strong men for the war?* 15 Moab is spoiled, and gone up out of her cities, and his chosen young men are gone down to the slaughter, saith the king, whose name is the LORD of hosts. 16 The calamity of Moab is near to come, and his affliction hasteth fast. 17 All ye that are about him, bemoan him; and all ye that know his name, say, How is the strong staff broken, and the beautiful rod! 18 Thou daughter that dost inhabit Dibon, come down from thy glory, and sit in thirst; for the spoiler of Moab shall come upon thee, and he shall destroy thy strong holds. 19 O inhabitant of Aroer, stand by the way, and espy; ask him that fleeth, and her that escapeth, and say, What is done? 20 Moab is confounded; for it is broken down: howl and cry; tell ye it in Arnon, that Moab is spoiled, 21 And judgment is come upon the plain country; upon Holon, and upon Jahazah, and upon Mephaath, 22 And upon Dibon, and upon Nebo, and upon Beth-dib-lathaim, 23 And upon Kiriathaim, and upon Beth-gamul, and upon Beth-meon, 24 And upon Kerioth, and upon Bozrah, and upon all the cities of the land of Moab, far or near. 25 The horn of Moab is cut off, and his arm is broken, saith the LORD. 26 Make ye him drunken: for he magnified himself against the LORD: Moab also shall wallow in his vomit, and he also shall be in derision. 27 For was not Israel a derision unto thee? was he found among thieves? for since thou spakest of him, thou skippedst for joy. 28 O ye that dwell in Moab, leave the



cities, and dwell in the rock, and be like the dove *that* maketh her nest in the sides of the hole's mouth. 29 We have heard the pride of Moab, (he is exceeding proud) his loftiness, and his arrogancy, and his pride, and the haughtiness of his heart. 30 I know his wrath, saith the LORD; but *it shall not be* so; his lies shall not so effect *it*. 31 Therefore will I howl for Moab, and I will cry out for all Moab; *mine heart* shall mourn for the men of Kir-heres. 32 O vine of Sibmah, I will weep for thee with the weeping of Jazer: thy plants are gone over the sea, they reach *even* to the sea of Jazer: the spoiler is fallen upon thy summer fruits and upon thy vintage. 33 And joy and gladness is taken from the plentiful field, and from the land of Moab; and I have caused wine to fail from the wine-presses: none shall tread with shouting; *their shouting shall be* no shouting. 34 From the cry of Heshbon *even* unto Elealeh, and *even* unto Jahaz, have they uttered their voice, from Zoar *even* unto Horonaim, as a heifer of three years old: for the waters also of Nimrim shall be desolate. 35 Moreover I will cause to cease in Moab, saith the LORD, him that offereth in the high places, and him that burneth incense to his gods. 36 Therefore mine heart shall sound for Moab like pipes, and mine heart shall sound like pipes for the men of Kir-heres: because the riches *that* he hath gotten are perished. 37 For every head *shall be* bald, and every beard clipped: upon all the hands *shall be* cuttings, and upon the loins sackcloth. 38 *There shall be* lamentation generally upon all the housetops of Moab, and in the streets thereof: for I have broken Moab like a vessel wherein *is* no pleasure, saith the LORD. 39 They shall howl, *saying*, How is it broken down! how hath Moab turned the back with shame! so shall Moab be a derision and a dismaying to all them about him. 40 For thus saith the LORD; Behold, he shall fly as an eagle, and shall spread his wings over Moab.

41 Kerioth is taken, and the strong holds are surprised, and the mighty men's hearts in Moab at that day shall be as the heart of a woman in her pangs. 42 And Moab shall be destroyed from *being* a people, because he hath magnified *himself* against the LORD. 43 Fear, and the pit, and the snare, *shall be* upon thee, O inhabitant of Moab, saith the LORD. 44 He that fleeth from the fear shall fall into the pit; and he that getteth up out of the pit shall be taken in the snare: for I will bring upon it, *even* upon Moab, the year of their visitation, saith the LORD. 45 They that fled stood under the shadow of Heshbon because of the force: but a fire shall come forth out of Heshbon, and a flame from the midst of Sihon, and shall devour the corner of Moab, and the crown of the head of the tumultuous ones. 46 Woe be unto thee, O Moab! the people of Chemosh perisheth: for thy sons are taken captives, and thy daughters captives. 47 Yet will I bring again the captivity of Moab in the latter days, saith the LORD. Thus far *is* the judgment of Moab.

The destruction is here further prophesied of very largely and with a great copiousness and variety of expression, and very pathetically and in moving language, designed not only to awaken them by a national repentance and reformation to prevent the trouble, or by a personal repentance and reformation to prepare for it, but to affect us with the calamitous state of human life, which is liable to such lamentable occurrences, and with the power of God's anger and the terror of his judgments, when he comes forth to contend with a provoking people. In reading this long roll of threatenings, and meditating on the terror of them, it will be of more use to us to keep this in our eye, and to get our hearts thereby possessed with a holy awe of God and of his wrath, than to enquire critically into all the lively figures and metaphors here used.

I. It is a surprising destruction, and very sudden, that is here threatened. They were very secure, thought themselves strong for war and able to deal with the most powerful enemy (v. 14), and yet the calamity is near, and he is not able to keep it off, nor so much as to keep the enemy long in parley, for the affliction *hastens fast* (v. 16) and will soon come to a crisis. The enemy shall fly as an eagle, so swiftly, so strongly shall he come

(v. 40), as an eagle flies upon his prey, and *he shall spread his wings*, the wings of his army, *over Moab*; he shall surround it, that none may escape. *The strong-holds of Moab* are taken by *surprise* (v. 41), so that all their strength stood them in no stead; and this made *the hearts even of their mighty men to fail*, for they had not time to recollect the considerations that might have animated them. It requires a more than ordinary degree of courage not to be *afraid of sudden fear*.

II. It is an utter destruction, and such as lays Moab all in ruins: *Moab is spoiled* (v. 15), quite spoiled, is *confounded and broken down* (v. 20); their cities are laid in ashes, or seized by the enemy, so that they are forced to quit them, v. 15. Divers cities are here named, upon which judgment has come, and the list concludes with an *et cetera*—*and such like*. What occasion was there for him to mention more particulars when it comes upon *all the cities of Moab* in general, *far and near*? v. 21—24. Note, When iniquity is universal we have reason to expect that calamity should be so too. The kingdom is deprived of its dignity and authority: *The horn of Moab is cut off*, the horn of its strength and power, both offensive and defensive; *his arm is broken*, that he can neither give a blow nor prevent a blow, v. 25. Is the youth of the kingdom the strength and beauty of it? *His chosen young men have gone down to the slaughter*, v. 15. They went down to the battle promising themselves that they should return victorious; but God told them that they went *down to the slaughter*; so sure are those to fall against whom God fights. In a word, *Moab shall be destroyed from being a people*, v. 42. Those that are enemies to God's people will soon be made no people.

III. It is a lamentable destruction; it will be just matter of mourning and will turn joy into heaviness. 1. The prophet that foretels it does himself lament it, and mourns at the very foresight of it, from a principle of compassion to his fellow-creatures and concern for human nature. The prophet will himself *howl for Moab*; his very heart shall *mourn for them* (v. 31); he will *weep for the vine of Sibmah* (v. 32); his heart shall sound like pipes for Moab, v. 36. Though the destruction of Moab would prove him a true prophet, yet he could not think of it without trouble. The ruin of sinners is no pleasure to God, and therefore should be a pain to us; even those that give warning of it should lay it to heart. These passages, and many others in this chapter, are much the same with what Isaiah had used in his prophecies against Moab (Isa. xv. 16); for, though there was a long distance of time between that prophecy and this, yet they were both dictated by one and the same Spirit, and it becomes God's prophets to speak the language of those that went before them. It is no plagiarism sometimes to

make use of old expressions, provided it be with new affections and applications. 2. The Moabites themselves shall lament it; it will be the greatest mortification and grief imaginable to them. Those that sat in *glory*, in the midst of wealth, and mirth, and all manner of pleasure, shall *sit in thirst*, in a dry and thirsty land, where no water, no comfort is, v. 18. It is time for them to *sit in thirst*, and inure themselves to hardship, when *the spoiler has come*, who will strip them of all, and empty them. The Moabites in the remote corners of the country, that are furthest from the danger, will be inquisitive to know how the matter goes, what news from the army, will ask every one that *escapes*, *What is done?* v. 19. And when they are told that all is gone, that the invader is the conqueror, they will *howl and cry*, in bitterness and anguish of spirit (v. 20); they will abandon themselves to solitude, to lament the desolations of their country; they will *leave the cities* that used to be full of mirth, and  *dwell in the rock*, where they may have their fill of melancholy; they shall no more be singing birds, but mourning birds, like the dove (v. 28), *the doves of the valley*, Ezek. vii. 16. Let those that give themselves up to mirth know that God can soon change their note. Their sorrow shall be so very extreme that they shall make themselves *bald* and *cut themselves* (v. 37), which were expressions of a desperate grief, such as tempted men to be even their own destroyers. *Job* indeed *rent his mantle and shaved his head*, but he did not cut himself. When the flood of passion rises ever so high wisdom and grace must set bounds to it, set banks to it, to restrain it from such barbarities. The sorrow shall be universal (v. 38): *There shall be a general lamentation upon all the house-tops of Moab*, where they worshipped their idols, to whom they shall in vain bemoan themselves, and in all the streets, where they conversed with one another, for they shall be free in communicating their griefs and fears and in propagating them; for they see all lost: "*I have broken Moab like a vessel wherein is no pleasure*, which shall not be regarded and cannot be pieced again." That which Moab used to rejoice in was their pleasant fruits and the abundance of their rich wines. The delights of sense were all the matter of their joy. Take away these, destroy their gardens and vineyards, and you make all their mirth to cease, Hos. ii. 11, 12. There is great weeping when their plants are transplanted, *have gone over the sea* (v. 32), are carried into other countries, to be planted there. *The spoiler has fallen upon thy summer-fruits and upon thy vintage*, and it is this that makes the cry of Heshbon to reach even to Elealeh, v. 34. *Take joy and gladness from the plentiful field*, and you take it from the land of Moab, v. 33. If the wine fail from the wine-presses, that used to be trodden with acclamations



of joy, all their gladness is cut off. Take away that shouting, and there shall be no shouting. Note, Those who make the delights of sense their chief joy, their exceeding joy, since these are things they may easily be deprived of in a little time, subject themselves to the tyranny of the greatest grief; whereas those who rejoice in God may do that even when *the fig-tree does not blossom and there is no fruit in the vine*. These Moabites lost not only their wine, but their water too: *Even the waters of Nimrim shall be desolate* (v. 34), and therefore their grief grew extravagantly loud and noisy, and their lamentations were heard in all places like the lowing of a heifer of three years old. The expressions here are borrowed from Isa. xv. 5, 6. 3. All their neighbours are called to mourn with them, and to condole with them on their ruin (v. 17): *All you that are about him bemoan him*. Let him have that allay to his grief, let him see himself pitied by the adjoining countries. Nay, let those at a distance, who do but know his name and have heard of his reputation, take notice of his fall, and say, *How is the strong staff broken*, whose strength was the terror of its enemies, *and the beautiful rod*, whose beauty was the pride of its friends! Let the nations take notice of this and receive instruction. Let none be puffed up with or put confidence in their strength or beauty, for neither will be a security against the judgments of God.

IV. It is a shameful destruction and such as shall expose them to contempt: *Moab is made drunk* (v. 26), and he that is made drunk is made vile; he *shall wallow in his vomit*, and become an odious spectacle, *and shall justly be in derision*. Let the Moabites be intoxicated with the cup of God's wrath till they stagger and fall, and be brought to *their wits' end*, and make themselves ridiculous by the wildness not only of their passions but of their counsels. And again (v. 39): *Moab shall be a derision and a dismay to all about him*; they shall laugh at the fall of the pomp and power he was so proud of. Note, Those that are haughty are preparing reproach and ignominy for themselves.

V. It is the destruction of that which is dear to them, not only of their summer fruits and their vintage, but of their wealth (v. 36): *The riches that he has gotten have perished*; though he thought he had laid them up very safely, and promised himself a long enjoyment of them, yet they are gone. Note, The money that is hoarded in the chest is as liable to perishing as the summer-fruits that lie exposed in the open field. Riches are shedding things, and, like dust as they are, slip through our fingers even when we are in most care to hold them fast and gripe them hard. Yet this is not the worst; even those whose religion was false and foolish were fond of it above any thing, and, such

as it was, would not part with it; and therefore, though it was really a promise, yet to them it was a threatening (v. 33), that *God will cause to cease him that offers in the high places*, for the high places shall be destroyed, and the fields of offerings shall be laid waste, and the priests themselves, *who burnt incense to their gods*, shall be slain or carried into captivity, v. 7. Note, It is only the true religion, and the worship and service of the true God, that will stand us in stead in a day of trouble.

VI. It is a just and righteous destruction, and that which they have deserved and brought upon themselves by sin.

1. The sin which they had been most notoriously guilty of, and for which God now reckoned with them, was pride. It is mentioned six times, v. 29. *We have all heard of the pride of Moab*; his neighbours took notice of it; it has testified to his face, as Israel's did; *he is exceedingly proud*, and grows worse and worse. Observe his *loftiness, his arrogancy, his pride, his haughtiness*; the multiplying of words to the same purport intimates in how many instances he discovered his pride, and how offensive it was both to God and man. It was charged upon them Isa. xvi. 6, but here it is expressed more largely than there. Since then they had been under humbling providences, and yet were unhumbled; nay, they grew more arrogant and haughty, which plainly marked them for that utter destruction of which pride is the forerunner. Two instances are here given of the pride of Moab:—(1.) He had conducted himself insolently towards God. He must be brought down with shame (v. 26), for he has *magnified himself against the Lord*; and again (v. 42), *he shall be destroyed from being a people*, for this very reason. The Moabites preferred Chemos before Jehovah, and thought themselves a match for the God of Israel, whom they set at defiance. (2.) He had conducted himself scornfully towards Israel, particularly in their late troubles; therefore Moab shall fall into the same troubles, into the same hands, and be a derision, for Israel was a derision to him, v. 26, 27. The generality of the Moabites, when they heard of the calamities and desolations of their neighbours the Jews, instead of lamenting them, rejoiced in them as if they had been thieves taken in the act of robbing; as often as they spoke of them, they *skipped for joy*. Many, in such a case, entertain in their minds a secret pleasure at the fall of those they had a dislike to, who yet have so much discretion as to conceal it; it is so invidious a thing. But the Moabites industriously proclaimed their joy, and avowed the enmity they had to Israel, triumphing over every Israelite they met with in distress and laughing at him, which was as inhuman as it was impious and an impudent affront both to man, whose nature they were of, and to

God, whose name they were called by. Note, Those that deride others in distress will justly and certainly, sooner or later, come into distress themselves, and be had in derision. Those that are *glad at calamities*, especially the calamities of God's church, *shall not long go unpunished*.

2. Besides this they had been guilty of malice against God's people, and treachery in their dealings with them, *v. 30*. They made a jest of the desolations of Judah and Jerusalem, and pretended, when they laughed at them, that it was but in sport and to make themselves merry; but, says God, "*I know his wrath*; I know it comes from the old enmity he has to the seed of Abraham and the worshippers of the true God. *I know* he thinks these calamities of the Jewish nation will end in their utter extirpation. He now tells the Chaldeans what bad people the Jews are, and irritates them against them; *but it shall not be so* as he expects; *his lies shall not so effect it*. The nation, whose fall they triumph in, shall recover itself." Some read it, *I know his rage*. *Is it not so?* Is he not very furious against the people of God? And *his lies I know* also. *Do they not do so?* Do they not belie them? Note, All the fury and all the falsehood of the church's enemies are perfectly known to God, whatever the pretences are with which they think to cover them, *Isa. xxxvii. 28*.

VII. It is a complicated destruction, and by one instance after another will at length be completed; for those that make their escape from one judgment shall perish by another: *Fear, and the pit, and the snare, shall be upon them, v. 43*. There shall be fear to drive them into the pit, and a snare to hold them fast in it when they are in it; so that they shall neither escape from the destruction nor escape out of it. What was said of sinners in general (*Isa. xxiv. 17, 18*), that those who *flee from the fear shall fall into the pit* and those who *come up out of the pit shall be taken in the snare*, is here particularly foretold concerning the sinners of Moab (*v. 44*); for it is *the year of their visitation*, when God comes to reckon with them, and will be *known by the judgments which he executes*, for he is *the King whose name is the Lord of hosts* (*v. 15*); he is not only *the King* who has authority to give judgment, but he is *the Lord of hosts*, who is able to do what he has determined. The figurative expressions used *v. 44* are explained in one instance (*v. 45*): *Those that fled out of the villages for fear of the enemy's forces put themselves under the shadow of Heshbon*, stood there, and supposed they stood safely, as now armies sometimes retire under the cannon of a fortified city, and it is their protection; but here they should be disappointed, for, when they *flee out of the pit, they fall into the snare*; Heshbon, which they thought would shelter them, devours them, as Moses had foretold long

since (*Num. xxi. 28*): *A fire has gone out of Heshbon, and a flame from the city of Sihon, and devours those that come from all the corners of Moab, and fastens upon the crown of the head of the tumultuous noisy ones*, or of the revellers, or children of noise, not meant of the rude clamorous multitude, but of the great men, who bluster, and hector, and make a noise; the judgments of God shall light on them. Shall we hear the conclusion of this whole matter? We have it (*v. 46*): "*Woe be to thee, O Moab! thou art undone, the people that worship Chemosh perish*, and are gone; farewell, Moab. *Thy sons and daughters*, the hopes of the next generation, have gone into captivity after the Jews, whose calamities they rejoiced in."

VIII. Yet it is not a perpetual destruction. The chapter concludes with a short promise of their return out of captivity in the latter days. God, who brings them into captivity, will bring again their captivity, *v. 47*. Thus tenderly does God deal with Moabites, much more with his own people! Even with Moabites he *will not contend for ever, nor be always wrath*. When Israel returned, Moab did; and perhaps the prophecy was intended chiefly for the encouragement of God's people to hope for that salvation which even Moabites shall share in. Yet it looks further, to gospel times; the Jews themselves refer it to the days of the Messiah; then the captivity of the Gentiles, under the yoke of sin and Satan, shall be brought back by divine grace, which shall *make them free, free indeed*. This prophecy concerning Moab is long, but here it ends; it ends comfortably: *Thus far is the judgment of Moab*.

#### CHAP. XLIX.

The cup of trembling still goes round, and the nations must all drink of it, according to the instructions given to Jeremiah, *ch. xxv. 15*. This chapter puts it into the hands, I. Of the Ammonites, *ver. 1-6*. II. Of the Elamites, *ver. 7-22*. III. Of the Syrians, *ver. 23-27*. IV. Of the Kedarenes, and the kingdoms of Hazor, *ver. 28-33*. V. Of the Elamites, *ver. 34-39*. When Israel was scarcely saved where shall all these appear?

CONCERNING the Ammonites, C thus saith the LORD; Hath Israel no sons? hath he no heir? why then doth their king inherit Gad, and his people dwell in his cities? 2 Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will cause an alarm of war to be heard in Rabbah of the Ammonites; and it shall be a desolate heap, and her daughters shall be burned with fire: then shall Israel be heir unto them that were his heirs, saith the LORD. 3 Howl, O Heshbon, for Ai is spoiled: cry, ye daughters of Rabbah, gird you with sackcloth; lament, and run to and fro by the hedges; for their king shall go into captivity, and his priests and his



princes together. 4 Wherefore gloriest thou in the valleys, thy flowing valley, O backsliding daughter? that trusted in her treasures, *saying*, Who shall come unto me? 5 Behold, I will bring a fear upon thee, saith the Lord God of hosts, from all those that be about thee; and ye shall be driven out every man right forth; and none shall gather up him that wandereth. 6 And afterward I will bring again the captivity of the children of Ammon, saith the Lord.

The Ammonites were next, both in kindred and neighbourhood, to the Moabites, and therefore are next set to the bar. Their country joined to that of the two tribes and a half, on the other side Jordan, and was but a bad neighbour; however, being a neighbour, they shall have a share in these circular predictions. 1. An action is here brought, in God's name, against the Ammonites, for an illegal encroachment upon the rightful possessions of the tribe of Gad, that lay next them, v. 1. A writ of enquiry is brought to discover what title they had to those territories, which, upon the carrying away of the Gileadites, by the king of Assyria (2 Kings xv. 29, 1 Chron. v. 26), were left almost dispeopled, at least unguarded, and an easy prey to the next invader. "What! Does it escheat *ob defectum sanguinis*—for want of an heir? Hath Israel no sons? Hath he no heir? Are there no Gadites left, to whom the right of inheritance belongs? Or, if there were not, are there no Israelites, none left of Judah, that are nearer akin to them than you are? Why then does *their king*, as if he were entitled to the forfeited estates, or Milcom, their idol, as if he had the right to dispose of it to his worshippers, *inherit Gad, and his people dwell in the cities* which fell by lot to that tribe of God's people. Nay, there were sons and heirs of their own body, *en ventre de sa mere*—in their mothers' womb, and the Ammonites, to prevent their claim, most barbarously murdered them (Amos i. 13): *They ripped up the women with child of Gilead, that they might enlarge their border*, that, having seized it, none might rise up hereafter to recover it from them. Thus they magnified themselves against their border and boasted it was their own, Zeph. ii. 8. Note, Though among men might often prevails against right, yet that might shall be controlled by the Almighty, who sits in the throne, judging right; and those will find themselves mistaken who think every thing their own which they can lay their hands on, or which none yet appears to lay claim to. As there is justice owing to owners, so also to their heirs, when they are dead, whom it is a great sin to defraud, though they either know not

their right or know not how to come at it. This shall be reckoned for particularly, when injuries of this kind are done to God's people. 2. Judgment is here given against them for this violence. (1.) Terrors shall come upon them: *God will cause an alarm of war to be heard, even in Rabbah*, their capital city and a very strong one, v. 2. The Lord God of hosts, who has all armies at his command, will bring a fear upon them from all that be about them, v. 3. Note, God has many ways to terrify those who have been a terror to his people. (2.) Their cities shall be laid in ruins: *Rabbah, the mother-city, shall be a desolate heap, and her daughters, the other cities that have a dependence upon her, and receive law from her as daughters, shall be burnt with fire*; so that the inhabitants shall be forced to quit them, and they shall cry, and gird themselves with sackcloth, as having lost all they had, and not knowing whither to betake themselves. (3.) Their country, which they were so proud of, shall be wasted (v. 4): *Wherefore gloriest thou in the valleys, and trustest in thy treasures, O backsliding daughter?* They are charged with backsliding or turning away from God and from his worship, for they were the posterity of righteous Lot. It is true, they had never been so in covenant with God as Israel was; yet all idolaters may be called backsliders, for the worship of the true God was prior to that of false gods. *They were untoward and refractory* (so some read it); and, when they had forsaken their God, they gloried in their valleys, particularly one that was called the flowing valley, because it flowed with all good things. These they had violently taken away from Israel, and gloried in it when they had done so. They gloried in the strength of their valleys, so surrounded with mountains that they were inaccessible, gloried in the products of them, gloried in the treasures they got together out of them, *saying, Who shall come unto me?* While they bathed themselves in the pleasures of their country, they flattered themselves with a conceit that they should never be disturbed in the enjoyment of them: *To-morrow shall be as this day*; therefore they set God and his judgments at defiance; they are proud, voluptuous, and secure; but wherefore dost thou do so? Note, Those who backslide and turn away from God have little reason either to take complacency or to put confidence in any worldly enjoyments whatsoever, Hos. ix. 1. (4.) Their people, from the least to the greatest, shall be forced out of the country. Some shall flee to seek for shelter, others shall be carried into captivity, so that their land shall be quite evacuated: *Their king and his princes, nay, and Milcom, their god, and his priests, shall go into captivity* (v. 3), and every man shall be driven out right forth, shall take the next way, and make the best of it in his flight (v. 5), forgetting the valleys, the flowing val-

leys, which now fail them. And, to complete their misery, *none shall gather up him that wanders*, none shall open their doors to them, as Jael to Sisera, to entertain them; and those that flee shall be so much in care to secure themselves that they shall not take notice of others, no, not of those that are nearest to them, that wander, and are at a loss which way to go, as *ch. xlvii. 3. (5.)* Then the country of the Ammonites shall fall into the hands of the remaining Israelites (*v. 2*): *Then shall Israel be heir to those that were his heirs*, shall possess himself of their land who had possessed themselves of his, by way of reprisal. Note, The equity of divine Providence is to be acknowledged when the losses of the injured are recompensed out of the unjust gains of the injurious. Though the enemies of God's Israel may make a prey of them for a while, the tables will shortly be turned. 3. Yet there is a prospect given them of mercy hereafter (*v. 6*), as before to Moab. The day will come when *the captivity of the children of Ammon will be brought again*; for so it is in human affairs: the wheel goes round.

7 Concerning Edom, thus saith the LORD of hosts; *Is wisdom no more in Teman? is counsel perished from the prudent? is their wisdom vanished?* 8 Flee ye, turn back, dwell deep, O inhabitants of Dedan; for I will bring the calamity of Esau upon him, the time *that* I will visit him. 9 If grape-gatherers come to thee, would they not leave *some* gleaning grapes? if thieves by night, they will destroy till they have enough. 10 But I have made Esau bare, I have uncovered his secret places, and he shall not be able to hide himself: his seed is spoiled, and his brethren, and his neighbours, and he *is* not. 11 Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve *them* alive; and let thy widows trust in me. 12 For thus saith the LORD; Behold, they whose judgment *was* not to drink of the cup have assuredly drunken; and *art* thou he *that* shall altogether go unpunished? thou shalt not go unpunished, but thou shalt surely drink *of it*. 13 For I have sworn by myself, saith the LORD, that Bozrah shall become a desolation, a reproach, a waste, and a curse; and all the cities thereof shall be perpetual wastes. 14 I have heard a rumour from the LORD, and an ambassador is sent unto the heathens,

*saying*, Gather ye together, and come against her, and rise up to the battle. 15 For, lo, I will make thee small among the heathen, *and* despised among men. 16 Thy terribleness hath deceived thee, *and* the pride of thine heart, O thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, that holdest the height of the hill: though thou shouldst make thy nest as high as the eagle, I will bring thee down from thence, saith the LORD. 17 Also Edom shall be a desolation: every one that goeth by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss at all the plagues thereof. 18 As in the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighbour *cities* thereof, saith the LORD, no man shall abide there, neither shall a son of man dwell in it. 19 Behold, he shall come up like a lion from the swelling of Jordan against the habitation of the strong: but I will suddenly make him run away from her: and who *is* a chosen man, *that* I may appoint over her? for who *is* like me? and who will appoint me the time? and who *is* that shepherd that will stand before me? 20 Therefore hear the counsel of the LORD, that he hath taken against Edom; and his purposes, that he hath purposed against the inhabitants of Teman: surely the least of the flock shall draw them out: surely he shall make their habitations desolate with them. 21 The earth is moved at the noise of their fall, at the cry the noise thereof was heard in the Red Sea. 22 Behold, he shall come up and fly as the eagle, and spread his wings over Bozrah: and at that day shall the heart of the mighty men of Edom be as the heart of a woman in her pangs.

The Edomites come next to receive their doom from God, by the mouth of Jeremiah: they also were old enemies to the Israel of God; but their day will come to be reckoned with, and it is now at hand, and is foretold, not only for warning to them, but for comfort to the Israel of God, whose afflictions were very much aggravated by their triumphs over them and joy in their calamity, Ps. cxxxvii. 7. Many of the expressions used in this prophecy concerning Edom are borrowed from the prophecy of Obadiah, which is concerning Edom; for, all the prophets being inspired by one and the same Spirit.



there must needs be a wonderful harmony and agreement in their predictions. Now here it is foretold,

I. That the country of Edom should be all wasted and made desolate, that *the calamity of Esau* should be *brought upon him*, the calamity he has deserved, and God has long designed him, for his old sins, v. 8. The time is at hand when *God will visit him*, and call him to an account, and then they shall *flee from the sword, turn back from the battle, and dwell deep in some close caverns*, where they shall hide themselves. All they have shall be carried off by the conqueror; whereas *grape-gatherers will leave some gleanings*, and even *thieves know when they have enough and will destroy* no further, those that destroy them shall never be satiated, (v. 9, 10); they shall make *Esau quite bare*, shall strip the Edomites of all they have, shall find out ways and means to come at their most hidden treasure, shall discover even the *secret places* where they thought to secure their wealth, and rifle them, so that they shall none of them save their wealth, no, nor save themselves nor their children, that might be concealed in a little room: *He shall not be able to hide himself, and his seed too is spoiled. His brethren the Moabites, and his neighbours the Philistines*, whom he might have expected succours from, or at least shelter with, are spoiled as well as he and disabled to do him any service. *And he is not, or there is not he, there is none to him, none left him*, that may say what follows (v. 11), *Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive*. When they are flying, or dying, there shall be none left, no relation, no friend, no, not so much as any parish officers to take care of their wives and children that they leave behind. Edom is not, he is cut off and gone; nor is there any to say, *Leave me thy orphans*. If the master of a family be cut off, or forced away, it is some comfort if he have a friend to leave his family with, whom he can confide in; but they shall have none such, for they shall all be involved in the same calamity. The Chaldee makes these to be the words of God to his people, distinguishing them from the Edomites in this calamity; and they read it, "*But you, O house of Israel! you shall not leave your orphans; I will secure them, and let your widows rest on my word*. Whatever becomes of the widows and fatherless of the Edomites, I will take care of yours." Note, It is an unspeakable comfort to the people of God, when they are dying, that they may leave their surviving relations with God, may, in faith, commit them to him and encourage them to trust in him; and, though they cannot promise themselves great things in the world for them, yet they may hope that he will preserve them alive, always, provided that they trust in him. Let the Edomites, for their part, count upon no other than to be made

*a desolation and a reproach*; for the decree has gone forth; God hath *sworn it by himself* (v. 13), that *their cities shall be wasted*, nay, they shall be *perpetual wastes*, they shall be made mean and despicable; they had made a mighty figure, but God will make *them small among the heathen*; and those that despised God's people shall themselves be *despised among men* (v. 15, Obad. 2), nay, they shall be made monstrous, and even a prodigy (v. 17): *Edom shall be such a desolation that every one who goes by shall be astonished*; nay, worse yet, they shall be made a terror; Edom shall be made like Sodom and Gomorrah, none shall care for coming near the ruins of it, *no man shall abide there* (v. 18), such a frightful place shall it be made.

II. That the instruments of this destruction should be very resolute and formidable. They have their commission from God; he summons them into this service (v. 14): *I have heard a rumour, or report, from the Lord*, heard it by the prophecy of Obadiah, heard it by a whisper to myself, that an *ambassador, or herald, or messenger, is sent to the Gentiles*, who are to lay Edom waste, saying, *Gather you together, muster all the forces you can, and come against her*; for (v. 20) this is the counsel that he hath taken against Edom. The matter is settled, the decree has gone forth, and there is no resisting it. God has determined that Edom shall be laid waste, and then he that is to be employed in wasting it shall come swiftly and strongly. Nebuchadnezzar is he of whom it is here foretold, 1. That he shall come up like a lion, with fierceness and fury, like a lion enraged by the swelling of Jordan overflowing his banks, which forces him out of his covert by the water-side into the higher grounds, v. 19. He shall come roaring, come to devour all that come in his way. He shall come against the habitation of the strong, the forts and castles; and I will cause him to come suddenly into the land (so the next words might well be read), so as to find them unprovided with necessaries for a defence; for I will look out a *chosen man to appoint over her*, to do this execution, a man fit for the purpose, one chosen out of the people; for when God has work to do he will find out the fittest instruments to be employed in doing it: "*Who is like me for choosing the instruments, and spiring them for the work? And who will appoint me the time? Who will challenge me, and fix a time and place to meet me? Who will join issue with me in battle? And, when I send a lion into the flock, who is that shepherd that can, or dare, stand before me, or against me, to oppose that lion, and think to rescue any of the flock?*" Note, When God has work to do of any kind he will soon find those that are able to engage in it, and all the world cannot find those that are able to engage against it. Nay, if God will have Edom

destroyed, and their people dislodged, there needs not a lion, a fierce lion to do it: *Even the least of the flock shall draw them out* (v. 20); the meanest servant in Nebuchadnezzar's retinue, the weakest of all that follow his camp, shall draw them out for the slaughter, shall force them to flee, or to surrender, and make their habitations desolate with them. God can bring to pass the greatest works by instruments least likely. When the Chaldean army comes against the Edomites all hands shall be employed and the poorest soldier in it shall have a pluck at them. 2. Nebuchadnezzar shall come, not only like a lion, the king of beasts, but like an eagle, the king of birds (v. 22): *He shall fly as the eagle upon his prey*, so swiftly, so strongly, shall clap his wings upon Bozrah, to secure it for himself (as before, ch. xlviii. 40), and immediately the hearts of the mighty men shall fail them, for they shall see he is an enemy that it is in vain to struggle with.

III. That the Edomites' confidences should all fail them in the day of their distress. 1. They trusted to their wisdom, but that shall stand them in no stead. This is the first thing fastened upon in this prophecy against Edom, v. 7. That nation used to be famous for wisdom, and their statesmen were thought to excel in politics; and yet now they shall take such wrong measures in all their counsels, and be so baffled in all their designs, that people shall ask, with wonder, What is the matter with the Edomites? *Is wisdom no more in Teman?* Have the wise men of the east country (1 Kings iv. 30) become fools? Are those at their wits' end that were thought to have the monopoly of prudence? *Has counsel perished from the understanding men?* It is so, when God is designing the ruin of a people; for whom he will destroy he infatuates. See Job xii. 20. *Has their wisdom vanished? Is it tired?* (so some); *is it worn out?* (so others); *has it become useless?* so others. Yes, it will do them no service when God comes forth to contend with them. 2. They trusted to their strength, but neither shall that avail them, v. 16. They had been a terror to all their neighbours; every body feared them and trucked to them, and this made them proud and conceited of themselves and their own strength, and very secure; because no neighbouring nation durst meddle with them, they thought no nation in the world durst. Their country was much of it mountainous, having many passes which they thought themselves able to make good against any invader; but this terribleness of theirs deceived them, and so did their imaginary inaccessibleness; they did not prove so strong as they were formidable, nor so safe as they were secure. High as they are, God will bring them down; for, as there is no wisdom, so there is no might against the Lord. See these expressions, Obad. 3, 4, 8.

IV. That their destruction should be inevitable and very remarkable. 1. God hath determined it (v. 12); he hath said it; nay (v. 13), he hath sworn it, that the Edomites shall not go unpunished, but they shall drink the cup of trembling, which is put into the hands of all their neighbours; even those whose judgment, or doom, was not to drink of the cup, who had not so well deserved it as they had done, nations that had not been such enemies to Israel as they had been, or Israel itself, that was God's peculiar people, and among whom there were many, very many, who kept his ordinances, upon which account they might have expected an exemption; and yet they had been made to drink of the bitter cup; and shall the Edomites think to pass it? No; they shall surely drink of it. Note, When God punishes the less guilty it is folly for the more guilty to promise themselves impunity; and when judgment begins at God's house it will reach the strangers. 2. All the world shall take notice of it (v. 21): *The earth is moved*, and all the nations are put into a concern, at the noise of their fall; the news of it shall make them tremble. *The noise of the outcry is heard to the Red Sea*, which flowed upon the coasts of Edom. So loud shall be the shouts of the conquerors and the shrieks of the conquered, and such a mighty noise shall the news of this destruction of Idumea make in the nations, that it shall be heard among the ships that lie in the Red Sea to take in lading (1 Kings ix. 26), and then they shall carry the news of it to the remotest shore. Note, The fall of those who have affected to make a noise with their pomp and power will make so much the greater noise.

23 Concerning Damascus. Hamath is confounded, and Arpad: for they have heard evil tidings: they are fainthearted; there is sorrow on the sea; it cannot be quiet. 24 Damascus is waxed feeble, and turneth herself to flee, and fear hath seized on her: anguish and sorrows have taken her, as a woman in travail. 25 How is the city of praise not left, the city of my joy! 26 Therefore her young men shall fall in her streets, and all the men of war shall be cut off in that day, saith the Lord of hosts. 27 And I will kindle a fire in the wall of Damascus, and it shall consume the palaces of Ben-hadad.

The kingdom of Syria lay north of Canaan, as that of Edom lay south, and thither we must now remove and take a view of the approaching fate of that kingdom, which had been often vexatious to the Israel of God. Damascus was the metropolis of that kingdom, and the ruin of the whole is sup-



posed in the ruin of that; yet Hamath and Arpad, two other considerable cities, are named (v. 23), and *the palaces of Ben-hadad*, which he built, are particularly marked for ruin, v. 27; see also Amos i. 4. Some think Ben-hadad (the son of Hadad, either their idol, or one of their ancient kings, whence the rest descended) was a common name of the kings of Syria, as Pharaoh of the kings of Egypt. Now observe concerning the judgment of Damascus, 1. It begins with a terrible fright and faint-heartedness. They *hear evil tidings*, that the king of Babylon, with all his force, is coming against them, and *they are confounded*; they know not what measures to take for their own safety, their souls are melted, *they are faint-hearted*, they have no spirit left them, they are like *the troubled sea, that cannot be quiet* (Isa. lvii. 20), or like men *in a storm at sea* (Ps. cvii. 26); or the sorrow that begins in the city shall go to the sea-coast, v. 23. See how easily God can dispirit those nations that have been most celebrated for valour. *Damascus now waxes feeble* (v. 24), a city that thought she could look the most formidable enemy in the face now *turns herself to flee*, and owns it is to no more purpose to think of contending with her fate than for a woman in labour to contend with her pains, which she cannot escape, but must yield to. It was a *city of praise* (v. 25), not praise to God, but to herself, a city much commended and admired by all strangers that visited it. It was a *city of joy*, where there was an affluence and confluence of all the delights of the sons of men, and abundance of mirth in the enjoyment of them. We read it (though there is no necessity for this) *the city of my joy*, which the prophet himself had sometimes visited with pleasure. Or it may be the speech of the king lamenting the ruin of *the city of his joy*. But now it is all overwhelmed with fear and grief. Note, Those deceive themselves who place their happiness in carnal joys; for God in his providence can soon cast a damp upon them and put an end to them. He can soon make a *city of praise* to be a reproach and a *city of joy* to be a terror to itself. 2. It ends with a terrible fall and fire. (1.) The inhabitants are slain (v. 26): *The young men*, who should fight the enemy and defend the city, *shall fall by the sword in her streets*; and *all the men of war*, mighty men, expert in war, and engaged in the service of their country, *shall be cut off*. (2.) The city is laid in ashes (v. 27): *The fire is kindled by the besiegers in the wall*, but it shall devour all before it, *the palaces of Ben-hadad* particularly, where so much mischief had formerly been hatched against God's Israel, for which it is now thus visited.

28 Concerning Kedar, and concerning the kingdoms of Hazor, which Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon

shall smite, thus saith the LORD; Arise ye, go up to Kedar, and spoil the men of the east. 29 Their tents and their flocks shall they take away: they shall take to themselves their curtains, and all their vessels, and their camels; and they shall cry unto them, Fear is on every side. 30 Flee, get you far off, dwell deep, O ye inhabitants of Hazor, saith the LORD; for Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon hath taken counsel against you, and hath conceived a purpose against you. 31 Arise, get you up unto the wealthy nation, that dwelleth without care, saith the LORD, which have neither gates nor bars, which dwell alone. 32 And their camels shall be a booty, and the multitude of their cattle a spoil: and I will scatter into all winds them that are in the utmost corners; and I will bring their calamity from all sides thereof, saith the LORD. 33 And Hazor shall be a dwelling for dragons, and a desolation for ever: there shall no man abide there, nor any son of man dwell in it.

These verses foretel the desolation that Nebuchadnezzar and his forces should make among the people of Kedar (who descended from Kedar the son of Ishmael, and inhabited a part of Arabia the Stony), and of the kingdoms, the petty principalities, of Hazor, that joined to them, who perhaps were originally Canaanites, of the kingdom of Hazor, in the north of Canaan, which had Jabin for its king, but, being driven thence, settled in the deserts of Arabia and associated themselves with the Kedarænes. Concerning this people we may here observe,

I. What was their present state and posture? They dwelt in tents and had no walls, but curtains (v. 29), no fortified cities; they had neither gates nor bars, v. 31. They were shepherds, and had no treasures, but stock upon land, no money, but flocks and camels. They had no soldiers among them, for they were in no fear of invaders, no merchants, for they dwell alone, v. 31. Those of other nations neither came among them nor traded with them; but they lived within themselves, content with the products and pleasures of their own country. This was their manner of living, very different from that of the nations that were round about them. And, 1. They were very rich; though they had no trade, no treasures, yet they are here said to be a *wealthy nation* (v. 31), because they had a sufficiency to answer all the occasions of human life and they were content with it. Note, Those are truly rich

who have enough to supply their necessities. and know when they have enough. We need not go to the treasures of kings and provinces, or to the cash of merchants, to look for wealthy people; they may be found among shepherds *that dwell in tents*. 2. They were very easy: *They dwell without care*. Their wealth was such as nobody envied them, or, if any did, they might come peaceably and enjoy the like; and therefore they feared nobody. Note, Those that live innocently and honestly may live very securely, though they have *neither gates nor bars*.

II. The design of the king of Babylon against them and the descent he made upon them: *He has taken counsel against you and has conceived a purpose against you*, v. 30. That proud man resolves it shall never be said that he, who had conquered so many strong cities, will leave those unconquered *that dwell in tents*. It was strange that that eagle should stoop to catch these flies, that so great a prince should play at such small game; but all is fish that comes to the ambitious covetous man's net. Note, It will not always secure men from suffering wrong to be able to say that they have done no wrong; not to have given offence will not be a defence against such men as Nebuchadnezzar. Yet, how unrighteous soever he was in doing it, God was righteous in directing it. These people had lived inoffensively among their neighbours, as many do, who yet, like them, are guilty before God; and it was to punish them for their offences against him that God said (v. 28): *Arise, go up to Kedar, and spoil the men of the east*. They will do it to gratify their own covetousness and ambition, but God orders it for the correcting of an unthankful people, and for warning to a careless world to expect trouble when they seem to be most safe. God says to the Chaldeans (v. 31): *"Arise, get up to the wealthy nation that dwells without care; go and give them an alarm, that none may imagine their mountain stands so strong that it cannot be moved."*

III. The great amazement that this put them into, and the great desolation hereby made among them: *They shall cry unto them; those on the borders shall send the alarm into all parts of the country, which shall be put into the utmost confusion by it; they shall cry, "Fear is on every side—We are surrounded by the enemy,"* the very terror of which shall drive them all to their feet and they shall none of them have any heart to make resistance. The enemy shall *proclaim fear upon them, or against them, on every side*. They need not strike a stroke; they shall shout them out of their tents, v. 29. Upon the first alarm, they shall *flee, get far off, and dwell deep* (v. 30), as the Edomites, v. 8. And it will be found that this *fear on every side* is not groundless, for *their calamity shall be brought from all sides*

*thereof*, v. 32. No marvel there are *fears on every side* when there are foes on every side. The issue will be, 1. What they have will be a prey to the Chaldeans; they shall *take to themselves their curtains and vessels*; though they are but plain and coarse, and they have better of their own, yet they shall take them for spite, and spoil for spoiling sake. *They shall carry away their tents and their flocks*, v. 29. *Their camels* shall be a booty to those that came for nothing else, v. 32. 2. It is not said that any of them shall be slain, for they attempt not to make any resistance and their tents and flocks are accepted as a ransom for their lives; but they shall be dislodged and dispersed; though now they dwell *in the utmost corners*, out of the way, and therefore they think out of the reach, of danger (by this character those people were distinguished, ch. ix. 26, 25, 23), yet they shall be *scattered thence into all winds*, into all parts of the world. Note, Privacy and obscurity are not always a protection and security. Many that affect to be strangers to the world may yet by unthought-of providences be forced into it; and those that live most retired may have the same lot with those that thrust themselves forth and lie most exposed. 3. Their country shall lie uninhabited; for, lying remote and out of all high roads, and having neither cities nor lands inviting to strangers, none shall care to succeed them, so that *Hazor shall be a desolation for ever*, v. 33. If busy men be displaced, many strive to get into their places, because they lived great; but here are easy quiet men displaced, and *no man cares to abide where they did*, because they lived meanly.

34 The word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah the prophet against Elam in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, saying, 35 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will break the bow of Elam, the chief of their might. 36 And upon Elam will I bring the four winds from the four quarters of heaven, and will scatter them toward all those winds; and there shall be no nation whither the outcasts of Elam shall not come. 37 For I will cause Elam to be dismayed before their enemies, and before them that seek their life: and I will bring evil upon them, *even* my fierce anger, saith the LORD; and I will send the sword after them, till I have consumed them: 38 And I will set my throne in Elam, and will destroy from thence the king and the princes, saith the LORD. 39 But it shall come to pass in the latter days, *that* I will



bring again the captivity of Elam, saith the LORD.

This prophecy is dated in the beginning of Zedekiah's reign; it is probable that the other prophecies against the Gentiles, going before, were at the same time. The Elamites were the Persians, descended from Elam the son of Shem (Gen. x. 22); yet some think it was only that part of Persia which lay nearest to the Jews which was called *Elymais*, and adjoined to Media-Elam, which, say they, had acted against God's Israel, bore the quiver in an expedition against them (Isa. xxii. 6), and therefore must be reckoned with among the rest. It is here foretold, in general, that God will bring evil upon them, even his fierce anger, and that is evil enough, it has all evil in it, v. 37. In particular, 1. Their forces shall be disabled, and rendered incapable of doing them any service. The Elamites were famous archers, but, Behold, I will break the bow of Elam (v. 35), will ruin their artillery, and then the chief of their might is gone. God often orders it so that that which we most trust to first fails us, and that which was the chief of our might proves the least of our help. 2. Their people shall be dispersed. There shall come enemies against them from all parts of the world, and they shall all carry some of them away captive into their respective countries; while others shall flee, some one way and some another, to shift for themselves, so that there shall be no nation whither the outcasts of Elam shall not come, v. 36. The four winds shall be brought upon them; the storm shall come sometimes from one point and sometimes from another, to toss and hurry them several ways. We know not from what point the wind of trouble may blow; but, if God encompass us with his favour, we are safe, and may be easy, which way soever the storm comes. Fear shall drive them into other countries; they shall be dismayed before their enemies; but, as if that were not enough, I will send the sword after them, v. 37. Note, God can make his judgments follow those that think by flight to escape them and to get out of the reach of them. Evil pursues sinners. 3. Their princes shall be destroyed and the government quite changed (v. 38): I will set my throne in Elam. The throne of Nebuchadnezzar shall be set there, or the throne of Cyrus, who began his conquests with Elymais. Or it may be meant of the throne on which God sits for judgment; he will make them know that he reigns, that he judges in the earth, that kings and princes are accountable to him, and that high as they are he is above them. The king of Elam was famous of old, Gen. xiv. 1. Chedorlaomer was king of Elam, and a mighty man he was in his day; the nations about him served him; his successors, we may suppose, made a great figure; but the king of Elam is no more to God than

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another man. When God sets his throne in Elam he will destroy thence the king and the princes that are, and set up whom he pleases.

4. Yet the destruction of Elam shall not be perpetual (v. 39): In the latter days I will bring again the captivity of Elam. When Cyrus had destroyed Babylon, brought the empire into the hands of the Persians, the Elamites no doubt returned in triumph out of all the countries whither they were scattered, and settled again in their own country. But this promise was to have its full and principal accomplishment in the days of the Messiah, when we find Elamites particularly among those who, when the Holy Ghost was given, heard spoken in their own tongues the wonderful works of God (Acts ii. 9, 11), and that is the most desirable return of the captivity. If the Son make you free, then you shall be free indeed.

## CHAP. L.

In this chapter, and that which follows, we have the judgment of Babylon, which is put last of Jeremiah's prophecies against the Gentiles because it was last accomplished; and when the cup of God's fury went round (ch. xlv. 17) the king of Sheshach, Babylon, drank last. Babylon was employed as the rod in God's hand for the chastising of all the other nations, and now at length that rod shall be thrown into the fire. The destruction of Babylon by Cyrus was foretold, long before it came to its height, by Isaiah, and now again, when it has come to its height, by Jeremiah; but, though at this time he saw that kingdom flourishing "like a green bay-tree," yet at the same time he foresaw it withered and cut down. And as Isaiah's prophecies of the destruction of Babylon and the deliverance of Israel out of it seem designed to typify the evangelical triumphs of all believers over the powers of the law, and the great salvation wrought out by our Lord Jesus Christ, so Jeremiah's prophecies of the same events seem designed to point at the apocalyptic triumphs of the gospel church in the latter days over the New-Testament Babylon, many passages in the Revelation being borrowed hence. The kingdom of Babylon being much larger and stronger than any other of the kingdoms here prophesied against, its fall was the more considerable in itself; and, it having been more oppressive to the people of God than any of the other, the prophet is very copious upon this subject, for the comfort of the captives; and what was foretold in general often before (ch. xlv. 12 and xlvii. 7) is here more particularly described, and with a great deal of prophetic heat as well as light. The terrible judgments God had in store for Babylon, and the glorious blessings he had in store for his people that were captives there, are intermingled and counterchanged in the prophecy of this chapter; for Babylon was destroyed to make way for the turning again of the captivity of God's people. Here is, 1. The ruin of Babylon, ver. 1-3, and again ver. 9-16, and again ver. 21-36, and again ver. 35-46. 11. The redemption of God's people, ver. 4-8, and again ver. 17-20, and again ver. 33, 34. And, these bring out the one against the other, it is easy to say which one would choose to take one's lot with, the persecuting Babylonians, who, though now in pomp, are reserved for so great a ruin, or the persecuted Israelites, who, though now in thralldom, are reserved for so great a glory.

THE word that the LORD spake against Babylon and against the land of the Chaldeans by Jeremiah the prophet. 2 Declare ye among the nations, and publish, and set up a standard; publish, and conceal not: say, Babylon is taken, Bel is confounded, Merodach is broken in pieces; her idols are confounded, her images are broken in pieces. 3 For out of the north there cometh up a nation against her, which shall make her land desolate, and none shall dwell therein: they shall remove, they shall depart, both man and beast. 4 In those days,

and in that time, saith the LORD, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping: they shall go, and seek the LORD their God. 5 They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, *saying*, Come, and let us join ourselves to the LORD in a perpetual covenant *that shall not be forgotten*. 6 My people hath been lost sheep: their shepherds have caused them to go astray, they have turned them away *on the mountains*: they have gone from mountain to hill, they have forgotten their restingplace. 7 All that found them have devoured them: and their adversaries said, We offend not, because they have sinned against the LORD, the habitation of justice; even the LORD, the hope of their fathers. 8 Remove out of the midst of Babylon, and go forth out of the land of the Chaldeans, and be as the he-goats before the flocks.

I. Here is a word spoken against Babylon by him whose works all agree with his word and none of whose words fall to the ground. The king of Babylon had been very kind to Jeremiah, and yet he must foretel the ruin of that kingdom; for God's prophets must not be governed by favour or affection. Whoever are our friends, if, notwithstanding, they are God's enemies, we dare not speak peace to them. 1. The destruction of Babylon is here spoken of as a thing done, *v. 2*. Let it be published to the nations as a piece of news, true news, and great news, and news they are all concerned in; let them hang out the flag, as is usual on days of triumph, to give notice of it; let all the world take notice of it: *Babylon is taken*. Let God have the honour of it, let his people have the comfort of it, and therefore do not conceal it. Take care that it be known, that *the Lord may be known by those judgments which he executes*, Ps. ix. 16. 2. It is spoken of as a thing done thoroughly. For, (1.) The very idols of Babylon, which the people would protect with all possible care, and from which they expected protection, shall be destroyed. Bel and Merodach were their two principal deities; they shall be *confounded*, and the images of them *broken to pieces*. (2.) The country shall be laid waste (*v. 3*) out of the north, from Media, which lay north of Babylon, and from Assyria, through which Cyrus made his descent upon Babylon; thence the nation shall come that shall make *her land desolate*. Their land was north of the coun-

tries that they destroyed, who were therefore threatened with evil from the north (*Omne malum ab aquilone—Every evil comes from the north*); but God will find out nations yet further north to come upon them. The pomp and power of old Rome were brought down by northern nations, the Goths and Vandals.

II. Here is a word spoken for the people of God, and for their comfort, both *the children of Israel and of Judah*; for many there were of the ten tribes that associated with those of the two tribes in their return out of Babylon. Now here,

1. It is promised that they shall return to their God first and then to their own land; and the promise of their conversion and reformation is that which makes way for all the other promises, *v. 4, 5*. (1.) They shall *lament after the Lord* (as the whole house of Israel did in Samuel's time, 1 Sam. vii. 2); they shall *go weeping*. These tears flow not from the sorrow of the world as those when they went into captivity, but from godly sorrow; they are tears of repentance for sin, tears of joy for the goodness of God, in the dawning of the day of their deliverance, which, for aught that appears, does more towards the bringing of them to mourn for sin than all the calamities of their captivity; that prevails to *lead them to repentance* when the other did not prevail to drive them to it. Note, It is a good sign that God is coming towards a people in ways of mercy when they begin to be tenderly affected under his hand. (2.) They shall *enquire after the Lord*; they shall not sink under their sorrows, but bestir themselves to find out comfort where it is to be had: *They shall go weeping to seek the Lord their God*. Those that seek the Lord must *seek him sorrowing*, as Christ's parents sought him, Luke ii. 48. And those that sorrow must seek the Lord, and then their sorrow shall soon be turned into joy, for he will be found of those that so seek him. They shall *seek the Lord as their God*, and shall now have no more to do with idols. When they shall hear that the idols of Babylon are *confounded and broken* it will be seasonable for them to enquire after their own God and to return to him who lives for ever. Therefore men are deceived in false gods, that they may depend on the true God only. (3.) They shall think of returning to their own country again; they shall think of it not only as a mercy, but as a duty, because there only is the *holy hill of Zion*, on which once stood the house of the Lord their God (*v. 5*): *They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward*. Zion was the city of their solemnities; they often thought of it in the depth of their captivity (Ps. cxxxvii. 1); but, now that the ruin of Babylon gave them some hopes of a release, they talk of nothing else but of going back to Zion. Their hearts were upon it before,



and now they *set their faces thitherward*. They long to be there; they set out for Zion, and resolve not to take up short of it. The journey is long and they know not the road, but they will *ask the way*, for they will press forward till they come to Zion; and, as they are determined not to turn back, so they are in care not to miss the way. This represents the return of poor souls to God. Heaven is the Zion they aim at as their end; on this they have set their hearts; towards this they have *set their faces*, and therefore they *ask the way* thither. They do not ask the way to heaven and set their faces towards the world; nor set their faces towards heaven and go on at a venture without asking the way. But in all true converts there are both a sincere desire to attain the end and a constant care to keep in the way; and a blessed sight it is to see people thus asking the way to heaven with their faces thitherward. (4.) They shall renew their covenant to walk with God more closely for the future: *Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant*. They had broken covenant with God, had in effect separated themselves from him, but now they resolve to *join themselves* to him again, by engaging themselves afresh to be his. Thus, when backsliders return, they must *do their first works*, must renew the covenant they first made; and it must be a *perpetual covenant*, that must never be broken; and, in order to that, must never be forgotten; for a due remembrance of it will be the means of a due observance of it.

2. Their present case is lamented as very sad, and as having been long so: "*My people*" (for he owns them as his now that they are returning to him) "*have been lost sheep* (v. 6); they have *gone from mountain to hill*, have been hurried from place to place, and could find no pasture; they have *forgotten their resting-place* in their own country and cannot find their way to it." And that which aggravated their misery was, (1.) That they were *led astray by their own shepherds*, their own princes and priests; they turned them from their duty, and so provoked God to turn them out of their own land. It is bad with a people when their leaders cause them to err, when those that should direct and reform them seduce and debauch them, and when those that should secure and advance their interests are the betrayers of them. (2.) That in their wanderings they lay exposed to the beasts of prey, who thought they were entitled to them, as waifs and strays that had no owner (v. 7); it is with them as with wandering sheep, *all that found them have devoured them* and made a prey of them; and when they did them the greatest injuries they laughed at them, telling them it was what their own prophets had many a time told them they deserved; that was far from justifying those who did them wrong,

yet they bantered them with this excuse, *We offend not, because they have sinned against the Lord*; but they could not pretend that they had sinned against them. And what notion they had of the Lord they had sinned against, not as the only true and living God, but only as *the habitation of justice and the hope of their fathers*; they had put a contempt upon the temple and upon the tradition of their ancestors, and therefore deserved to suffer these hard things. And yet it was indeed an aggravation of their sin, and justified God, though it did not justify their adversaries in what was done to them, that they had *forsaken the habitation of justice* and him that was *the hope of their fathers*.

3. They are called upon to hasten away, as soon as ever the door of liberty was opened to them (v. 8): "*Remove, not only out of the borders, but out of the midst of Babylon*; though you be ever so well settled there, think not to settle there, but hasten to Zion, and be as the *he-goats before the flocks*; strive which shall be foremost, which shall lead in so good a work:" a he-goat is *comely in going* (Prov. xxx 31) because he goes first. It is a graceful thing to be forward in a good work and to set others a good example.

9 For, lo, I will raise and cause to come up against Babylon an assembly of great nations from the north country: and they shall set themselves in array against her; from thence she shall be taken: their arrows *shall be* as of a mighty expert man; none shall return in vain. 10 And Chaldaea shall be a spoil: all that spoil her shall be satisfied, saith the LORD. 11 Because ye were glad, because ye rejoiced, O ye destroyers of mine heritage, because ye are grown fat as the heifer at grass, and bellow as bulls; 12 Your mother shall be sore confounded; she that bare you shall be ashamed: behold, the hindermost of the nations *shall be* a wilderness, a dry land, and a desert. 13 Because of the wrath of the LORD it shall not be inhabited, but it shall be wholly desolate: every one that goeth by Babylon shall be astonished, and him at all her plagues. 14 Put yourselves in array against Babylon round about: all ye that bend the bow, shoot at her, spare no arrows: for she hath sinned against the LORD. 15 Shout against her round about: she hath given her hand: her foundations are fallen, her

walls are thrown down : for it is the vengeance of the LORD : take vengeance upon her ; as she hath done, do unto her. 16 Cut off the sower from Babylon, and him that handleth the sickle in the time of harvest : for fear of the oppressing sword they shall turn every one to his people, and they shall flee every one to his own land. 17 Israel is a scattered sheep ; the lions have driven him away : first the king of Assyria hath devoured him ; and last this Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon hath broken his bones. 18 Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel ; Behold, I will punish the king of Babylon and his land, as I have punished the king of Assyria. 19 And I will bring Israel again to his habitation, and he shall feed on Carmel and Bashan, and his soul shall be satisfied upon mount Ephraim and Gilead. 20 In those days, and in that time, saith the LORD, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and *there shall be none* ; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found : for I will pardon them whom I reserve.

God is here by his prophet, as afterwards in his providence, proceeding in his controversy with Babylon. Observe,

I. The commission and charge given to the instruments that were to be employed in destroying Babylon. The army that is to do it is called *an assembly of great nations* (v. 9), the Medes and Persians, and all their allies and auxiliaries ; it is called *an assembly*, because regularly formed by the divine will and counsel to do this execution. God will *raise them up* to do it, will incline them to and fit them for this service, and then he will *cause them to come up*, for all their motions are under his conduct and direction : he shall give the word of command, shall order them to *put themselves in array against Babylon* (v. 14), and then *they shall put themselves in array* (v. 9), for what God appoints to be done shall be done ; and *thence she shall be quickly taken* ; from their first sitting down before it they shall be still gaining ground against it till it be taken. God shall bid them *shoot at her and spare no arrows* (v. 14), and then *their arrows shall be as of a mighty expert man*, that has both skill and strength, a good eye and a good hand (v. 9) ; *none shall return in vain*. When God gives commission he will give success. Nay, they are bidden not only to *shoot at her* (v. 14), but to *shout against her* (v. 15)

with a triumphant shout, as those that are already sure of victory. Those whom God directs to shoot may do so with shouting, for they are sure not to miss the mark.

II. The desolation and destruction itself that shall be brought upon Babylon. This is here set forth in a great variety of expressions. 1. The wealth of Babylon shall be a rich and easy prey to the conquerors (v. 10) : *Chaldea shall be a spoil* to all her destroyers, who shall enrich themselves by plundering her, and, which is strange, *all that spoil her shall be satisfied* ; they shall have so much that even they themselves shall say that they have enough. 2. The country of Babylon shall be depopulated and lie uninhabited : *It shall be wholly desolate* (v. 13) to such a degree that *every one who goes by* shall triumph in her fall, and, instead of condoling with them, shall *hiss at all her plagues*, v. 13. 3. Their ancestors shall be ashamed of their cowardice, in fleeing from the first onset (v. 12), or, *Your mother, Babylon itself, the mother-city, shall be confounded*, when she sees herself deserted by those that should have been her guards. Thus the former ages of Christians may justly be confounded and ashamed to see how unlike them the latter ages are, and how wretchedly they have degenerated ; and no sin brings a surer and sorer ruin upon persons, or people, than apostasy. 4. The great admirers of Babylon shall see it rendered very despicable : the last of kingdoms, the very tail of the nations, *shall it be, a wilderness, a dry land, a desert*, v. 12. 'The country that was populous shall be depopulated, that was enriched with a fertile soil shall become barren. 5. The great city, the head of it, shall be quite ruined. *Her foundations have fallen*, and therefore *her walls are thrown down* ; for how can the walls stand when divine vengeance is at the door and shakes the very foundations ? It is the vengeance of the Lord, which nothing can contend with either in law or battle. 6. There shall not be left in Babylon so much as *the poor of the land, for vine-dressers and husbandmen*, as there was in Israel (v. 16) : *The sower shall be cut off from Babylon, and he that handles the sickle* ; the country shall be so emptied of people that there shall be none to till the ground and gather in the fruits of it. Harvest shall come, and there shall be no reapers ; seed-time shall come, but there shall be no sower ; God will do his part, but there shall be no men to do theirs. 7. All their auxiliary forces, which they have hired into their service, shall desert them, as mercenary men often do upon the approach of danger (v. 16) : *For fear of the oppressing sword they shall turn every one to his people*. This was threatened before concerning Egypt, ch. xli. 16.

III. The procuring provoking cause of this destruction. It comes from God's displea-



sure; it is *because of the wrath of the Lord* that Babylon shall be *wholly desolate* (v. 13), and his wrath is righteous, for (v. 14) *she hath sinned against the Lord*, therefore *spare no arrows*. Note, It is sin that makes men a mark for the arrows of God's judgments. An abundance of idolatry and immorality was to be found in Babylon, yet those are not mentioned as the reason of God's displeasure against them, but the injuries they had done to the people of God, from a principle of enmity to them as his people. They have been the *destroyers of God's heritage* (v. 11); herein indeed God made use of them for the necessary correction of his people, and yet it is laid to their charge as a heinous crime, because they designed nothing but their utter destruction. 1. What they did against Jerusalem they did with pleasure (v. 11): *You were glad, you rejoiced*. God does not afflict his people willingly, and therefore takes it very ill if the instruments he employs afflict them willingly. When Titus Vespasian destroyed Jerusalem he wept over it, but these Chaldeans triumphed over it. 2. The spoils of Jerusalem they made use of to feed their own luxury: "*You have grown fat as the heifer at grass, and bellow as bulls*; your having conquered Jerusalem has made you very wanton and proud, easy to yourselves and formidable to all about you, and therefore you must be a spoil." Those that have thus swallowed down riches must vomit them up again. Therefore they have *given their hand* (v. 15); they have surrendered themselves to the conqueror, have tamely yielded, so that now you may *take vengeance on her*, now you may make reprisals and *do unto her as she hath done*. 3. They aimed at nothing less than the utter ruin of God's Israel: *Israel is a scattered sheep*, as before (v. 6), that is not only barked at and worried by dogs, but even lions, the most potent adversaries, have roared upon him and *driven him away*, v. 17. One king of Assyria carried the ten tribes quite away and devoured them; another invaded Judah, and plundered and impoverished it, tore the fleece and flesh of this poor sheep; and now at last this Nebuchadnezzar, that is the terror and plague of all his neighbours, has taken advantage of the low condition to which he is reduced, and he has fallen upon him and *broken his bones*, has quite ruined him, and therefore the king of Babylon must be punished as the king of Assyria was, v. 18. Note, Those who pursue and prosecute the sins of their predecessors must expect to be pursued and prosecuted by their plagues; if they do as they did, let them fare as they fared.

IV. The mercy promised to the Israel of God, which shall not only accompany, but accrue from, the destruction of Babylon. 1. God will return their captivity; they shall be released out of their bondage, and *brought again to their own habitation* as sheep that

were scattered to their own fold v. 19. They still retained a title to the land of Canaan; it is their habitation still. The discontinuance of their possession was not the destruction of their right. But now they shall recover the enjoyment of it again. 2. He will restore their prosperity; they shall not only live, but live comfortably, in their own land again; they shall *feed upon Carmel and Bashan*, the richest and most fruitful parts of the country. These sheep shall be gathered from the deserts to which they were dispersed, and put again into good pasture, which their soul shall be satisfied with; though they shall come hungry to it, having been so long stinted, and straitened, and kept short, yet they shall find enough to satiate them and shall have hearts to be satiated with it. They *enquired the way to Zion* (v. 5), where God was to be served and worshipped. This was what they chiefly aimed at in their return; but God will not only bring them thither, but bring them also to Carmel and Bashan, where they shall abundantly feed themselves. Note, Those that return to God and their duty shall find true satisfaction of soul in so doing; and those that seek first the kingdom of God and the righteousness thereof, that aim to make their habitation in Zion, the holy hill, shall have other things added to them, even all the comforts of Ephraim and Gilead, the fruitful hills. 3. God will pardon their iniquity; this is the root of all the rest (v. 20): *In those days the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none*. Not only the punishments of their iniquity shall be taken off, but the offence which it gave to God shall be forgotten, and he will be reconciled to them. Their sin shall be before him as if it had never been; it shall be blotted out as a cloud, crossed out as a debt, shall be cast behind his back; nay, it shall be cast into the depth of the sea, shall be no longer sealed up among God's treasures, nor in any danger of appearing again or rising up against them. This denotes how fully God forgives sin; he *remembers it no more*. Note, Deliverances out of trouble are then comforts indeed when they are the fruits of the forgiveness of sin, Isa. xxxviii. 17. Judah and Israel were so fully forgiven when they were brought back out of Babylon that they are said to have *received of the Lord's hand double for all their sins*, Isa. xl. 2. This may include also a thorough reformation of their hearts and lives, as well as a full remission of their sins. If any seek for idols or any idolatrous customs among them, after their return, *there shall be none, they shall not find them*; their dross shall be purely purged away, and by that it shall appear that their guilt is so; *for I will pardon those whom I reserve; I will be propitious to them* (so the word is) and that must be through him who is the great propitiator. Note, Those whose sins God pardons he re-

serves for something very great : for *whom* he justifies them he glorifies.

21 Go up against the land of Merathaim, *even* against it, and against the inhabitants of Pekod : waste and utterly destroy after them, saith the LORD, and do according to all that I have commanded thee. 22 A sound of battle *is* in the land, and of great destruction. 23 How is the hammer of the whole earth cut asunder and broken ! how is Babylon become a desolation among the nations ! 24 I have laid a snare for thee, and thou art also taken, O Babylon, and thou wast not aware : thou art found, and also caught, because thou hast striven against the LORD. 25 The LORD hath opened his armoury, and hath brought forth the weapons of his indignation : for this *is* the work of the Lord God of hosts in the land of the Chaldeans. 26 Come against her from the utmost border, open her store-houses : cast her up as heaps, and destroy her utterly : let nothing of her be left. 27 Slay all her bullocks ; let them go down to the slaughter : woe unto them ! for their day is come, the time of their visitation. 28 The voice of them that flee and escape out of the land of Babylon, to declare in Zion the vengeance of the LORD our God, the vengeance of his temple. 29 Call together the archers against Babylon : all ye that bend the bow, camp against it round about ; let none thereof escape : recompense her according to her work ; according to all that she hath done, do unto her : for she hath been proud against the LORD, against the Holy One of Israel. 30 Therefore shall her young men fall in the streets, and all her men of war shall be cut off in that day, saith the LORD. 31 Behold, I *am* against thee, O thou most proud, saith the Lord God of hosts : for thy day is come, the time *that* I will visit thee. 32 And the most proud shall stumble and fall, and none shall raise him up : and I will kindle a fire in his cities, and it shall devour all round about him.

Here, 1. The forces are mustered and

commissioned to destroy Babyion, and every thing is got ready for a descent upon that potent kingdom : *Go up against that land by Merathaim*, the country of the Mardi, that lay part in Assyria and part in Armenia ; and go among *the inhabitants of Pekod*, another country (mentioned Ezek. xxiii. 23) which Cyrus took in his way to Babylon. The forces of Cyrus are called to go up against Babylon (v. 21), to come against her from the utmost border. Let all come together, for there will be both work and pay enough for them all, v. 26. Distance of place must not be their hindrance from engaging in this work. *The archers particularly must be called together against Babylon*, v. 29. *Thus the Lord hath opened his armoury* (v. 25), *his treasury* (so the word is), and hath brought forth the weapons of his indignation, as great princes fetch out of their magazines and stores all necessary provisions for their armies when they undertake any great expedition. Media and Persia are now God's armoury ; thence he fetches the weapons of his wrath, Cyrus and his great officers and armies, whom he will make use of for the destruction of Babylon. Note, Great men are but instruments which the great God makes use of to serve his own purposes. He has variety of instruments, has them at command, has armouries ready to be opened according as the occasion is. *This is the work of the Lord God of hosts*. Note, When God has work to do he will make it appear that he is *God of hosts*, and will not want instruments to do it with. 2. Instructions are given them what to do. In general, *Do according to all that I have commanded thee*, v. 21. It was said of Cyrus (Isa. xlv. 28), *He shall perform all my pleasure*, in his expedition against Babylon. They must waste and utterly destroy after them ; when they have destroyed once they must go over them again, or destroy their posterity that should come after them. They must open her store-houses (v. 26), rifle her treasures, and turn her artillery against herself. They must cast her up as heaps ; let all the wealth and pomp of Babylon be shovelled up in a heap of ruins and rubbish. *Tread her down as heaps* (so the margin reads it) and destroy her utterly. See how little account the great God makes of those things which men so much value and value themselves so much upon. Their princes and great men, who are fat and bulky, shall fall by the sword, not as men of war in the field of battle, which we call a bed of honour, but as beasts by the butcher's hand (v. 27) : *Slay all her bullocks*, all her mighty men ; let them go down sottishly and insensibly, as an ox to the slaughter. *Woe unto them !* their case is the more sad for the little sense they have of it. *Their day has come to fall*, the time when they must be reckoned with, and they are not aware of it. 3. Assurances are given them of success. Let them do what God



commands, and they shall accomplish what he threatens. A great destruction shall be made, v. 22. *Babylon shall become a desolation* (v. 23); *her young men and all her men of war shall be cut off in that day* which should have been her defence, v. 30. God is against her (v. 31); he has laid a snare for her (v. 24); he has formed this enterprise against her, that she should be surprised as a bird taken in a snare. Cyrus shall no doubt prevail, for he fights under God. God will kindle a fire in the cities of Babylon (v. 32); and who can stand before him when he is angry, or quench the fire that he has kindled? 4. Reasons are given for these severe dealings with Babylon. Those that are employed in this war may, if they please, know the grounds of it, and be satisfied in the justice of it, which it is fit all should be that are called to such work. (1.) Babylon has been very troublesome, vexatious, and injurious, to all its neighbours; it has been the hammer of the whole earth (v. 23), beating, beating down, and beating to pieces, all the nations far and near. It has done so long enough; it is time now that it be cut asunder and broken. Note, He that is the God of nations will sooner or later assert the injured rights of nations against those that unjustly and violently invade them. The God of the whole earth will break the hammer of the whole earth. (2.) Babylon has bidden defiance to God himself: *Thou hast striven against the Lord* (v. 24), *hast joined issue with him* (so the word signifies) as in law or battle, hast openly opposed him, set up rivals with him, raised rebellion against him; therefore *thou art now found, and caught*, as in a snare. Note, Those that strive against the Lord will soon find themselves over-matched. (3.) Babylon ruined Jerusalem, the holy city, and the holy house there, and must now be called to an account for that. This is the manifesto published in Zion, in the day of Babylon's visitation; it is the vengeance of the Lord our God, the vengeance of his temple, v. 28. The burning of the temple, and the carrying away of its vessels, were articles in the charge against Babylon on which greater stress was laid than upon its being the hammer of the whole earth; for Zion was the joy and glory of the whole earth. Note, Whatever wrong is done to God's church (his temple in the world) it will certainly be reckoned for; and no vengeance will be sorer nor heavier than the vengeance of the temple. (4.) Babylon has been very haughty and insolent, and therefore must have a fall; for it is the glory of God to look upon those that are proud and to abase them, Job xl. 12. *I am against thee, O thou most proud!* v. 31 and again v. 32. *Thou pride* (so the word is), as proud as pride itself. Note, The pride of men's hearts sets God against them and ripens them apace for ruin; for God resists the proud and will bring them down. The

most proud shall stumble and fall; they shall fall not so much by others' thrusting them down as by their own stumbling; for they hold their heads so high that they never look under their feet, to choose their way and avoid stumbling-blocks, but walk at all adventures. Babylon's pride must unavoidably be her ruin; for she has been proud against the Lord, against the Holy One of Israel (v. 29), has insulted him in insulting over his people; she has made him her enemy, and therefore, when she has fallen, none shall raise her up, v. 32. Who can help those up whom God will throw down?

33 Thus saith the Lord of hosts; The children of Israel and the children of Judah were oppressed together: and all that took them captives held them fast; they refused to let them go. 34 Their Redeemer is strong; the Lord of hosts is his name: he shall thoroughly plead their cause, that he may give rest to the land, and disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon. 35 A sword is upon the Chaldeans, saith the Lord, and upon the inhabitants of Babylon, and upon her princes, and upon her wise men. 36 A sword is upon the liars; and they shall dote: a sword is upon her mighty men; and they shall be dismayed. 37 A sword is upon their horses, and upon their chariots, and upon all the mingled people that are in the midst of her; and they shall become as women: a sword is upon her treasures; and they shall be robbed. 38 A drought is upon her waters; and they shall be dried up: for it is the land of graven images, and they are mad upon their idols. 39 Therefore the wild beasts of the desert with the wild beasts of the islands shall dwell there, and the owls shall dwell therein: and it shall be no more inhabited for ever; neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation. 40 As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighbour cities thereof, with the Lord; so shall no man abide there, neither shall any son of man dwell therein. 41 Behold, a people shall come from the north, and a great nation, and many kings shall be raised up from the coasts of the earth. 42 They shall hold the bow and the lance:

they are cruel, and will not show mercy: their voice shall roar like the sea, and they shall ride upon horses, every one put in array, like a man to the battle, against thee, O daughter of Babylon. 43 The king of Babylon hath heard the report of them, and his hands waxed feeble: anguish took hold of him, and pangs as of a woman in travail. 44 Behold, he shall come up like a lion from the swelling of Jordan unto the habitation of the strong: but I will make them suddenly run away from her: and who is a chosen man, that I may appoint over her? for who is like me? and who will appoint me the time? and who is that shepherd that will stand before me? 45 Therefore hear ye the counsel of the LORD, that he hath taken against Babylon; and his purposes, that he hath purposed against the land of the Chaldeans: surely the least of the flock shall draw them out: surely he shall make their habitation desolate with them. 46 At the noise of the taking of Babylon the earth is moved, and the cry is heard among the nations.

We have in these verses,

I. Israel's sufferings, and their deliverance out of those sufferings. God takes notice of the bondage of his people in Babylon, as he did of their bondage in Egypt; he has surely seen it, and has heard their cry. *Israel and Judah were oppressed together*, v. 33. Those that remained of the captives of the ten tribes, upon the uniting of the kingdoms of Assyria and Chaldea, seem to have come and mingled with those of the two tribes, and to have mingled tears with them, so that they were *oppressed together*. They were humble suppliants for their liberty, and that was all; they could not attempt any thing towards it, for all that took them captives held them fast, and were much too hard for them. But this is their comfort in distress, that, though they are weak, *their Redeemer is strong* (v. 34), *their Avenger* (so the word signifies), he that has a right to them, and will claim his right and make good his claim. He is stronger than their enemies that hold them fast; he can overpower all the force that is against them, and put strength into his own people though they are very weak. *The Lord of hosts is his name*, and he will answer to his name, and make it to appear that he is what his people call him, and will be that to them for which they depend upon him. Note, It is the unspeakable comfort of the

people of God that, though they have hosts against them, they have *the Lord of hosts* for them; and *he shall thoroughly plead their cause*, pleading he shall plead it, plead it with jealousy, plead it effectually, plead it and carry it, *that he may give rest to the land*, to his people's land, rest from all their enemies round about. This is applicable to all believers, who complain of the dominion of sin and corruption, and of their own weakness and manifold infirmities. Let them know that *their Redeemer is strong*; he is able to keep what they commit to him, and he will plead their cause. Sin shall not have dominion over them; he will *make them free*, and they shall be *free indeed*; he will give them *rest*, that *rest which remains for the people of God*.

II. Babylon's sin, and their punishment for that sin.

1. The sins they are here charged with are idolatry and persecution. (1.) They oppressed the people of God; they *held them fast*, and would not let them go. They *opened not the house of his prisoners*, Isa. xiv. 17. This was God's quarrel with them, as of old with Pharaoh; it cost him dear, and yet they would not take warning. *The inhabitants of Babylon must be disquieted* (v. 34) because they have disquieted God's people, whose honour and comfort he is jealous for, and therefore will *recompense tribulation to those that trouble them*, as well as *rest to those that are troubled*, 2 Thess. i. 6, 7. (2.) They wronged God himself, and robbed him, giving that glory to others which is due to him alone; for (v. 38) *it is the land of graven images*. All parts of the country abounded with idols, and they were mad upon them, were in love with them and doted on them, cared not what cost and pains they were at in the worship of them, were unwearied in paying their respects to them; and in all this they were wretchedly infatuated and acted like men out of their wits; they were carried on in their idolatry without reason or discretion, like men in a perfect fury. The word here used for idols properly signifies *terrors*—*Enim*, the name given to giants that were formidable, because they made the images of their gods to look frightful, to strike a terror upon fools and children. Their idols were scarecrows, yet they doted on them. Babylon was *the mother of harlots* (Rev. xvii. 5), the source of idolatry. Note, It is the maddest thing in the world to make a god of any creature; and those who are proud against the Lord, the true God, are justly given up to strong delusions, to be mad upon idols that cannot profit. But this madness is wickedness, for which sinners will be certainly and severely reckoned with.

2. The judgments of God upon them for these sins are such as will quite lay them waste and ruin them.

(1.) All that should be their defence and support shall be cut off by the sword. The



Chaldeans had long been God's sword, where-with he had done execution upon the sinful nations round about: but now, they being as bad as any of them, or worse, a sword is brought upon them, even upon the inhabitants of Babylon (v. 35), a sword of war; and, as it is in God's hand, sent and directed by him, it is a sword of justice. It shall be, [1.] Upon their princes; they shall fall by it, and their dignity, wealth, and power, shall not secure them. [2.] Upon their wise men, their philosophers, their statesmen, and privy-counsellors; their learning and policy shall neither secure them nor stand the public in any stead. [3.] Upon their sooth-sayers and astrologers, here called the liars (v. 36), for they cheated with their prognostications of peace and prosperity; the sword upon them shall make them dote, so that they shall talk like fools, and be as men that have lost all their wits. Note, God has a sword that can reach the soul and affect the mind, and bring men under spiritual plagues. [4.] Upon their mighty men. A sword shall be upon their spirits; if they are not slain, yet they shall be dismayed, and shall be no longer mighty men; for what stead will their hands stand them in when their hearts fail them? [5.] Upon their militia (v. 37): *The sword shall be upon their horses and chariots*; the invaders shall make themselves masters of all their warlike stores, shall seize their horses and chariots for themselves, or destroy them. The troops of other nations that were in their service shall be quite disheartened: *The mingled people shall become as weak and timorous as women*. [6.] Upon their exchequer: *The sword shall be upon her treasures*, which are the sinews of war, and they shall be robbed, and made use of by the enemy against them. See what universal destruction the sword makes when it comes with commission.

(2.) The country shall be made desolate (v. 38): *The waters shall be dried up*, the water that secures the city. Cyrus drew the river Euphrates into so many channels as made it passable for his army, so that they got with ease to the walls of Babylon, which, it was thought, that river had rendered inaccessible. "The water likewise that made the country fruitful shall be dried up, so that it shall be turned into barrenness, and shall be no more inhabited by the children of men, but by the wild beasts of the desert," v. 39. This was foretold concerning Babylon, Isa. xiii. 19—22. It shall become like Sodom and Gomorrah, v. 40. The same was foretold concerning Edom, ch. xlix. 18. As the Chaldeans had laid Edom waste, so they shall themselves be laid waste.

(3.) The king and kingdom shall be put into the utmost confusion and consternation by the enemies' invading them, v. 41—43. All the expressions here used to denote the formidable power of the invaders, the terrors wherewith they should array themselves,

and the great fright which both court and country should be put into thereby, we met with before (ch. vi. 22—24) concerning the Chaldeans' invading the land of Judah. 'The battle which is there said to be against thee, O daughter of Zion! is here said to be against thee, O daughter of Babylon! to intimate that they should be paid in their own coin. God can find out such as shall be for terror and destruction to those that are for terror and destruction to others; and those who have dealt cruelly, and have shown no mercy, may expect to be cruelly dealt with, and to find no mercy. Only there is one difference between these passages; there it is said, *We have heard the fame thereof and our hands wax feeble*; here it is said, *The king of Babylon has heard the report and his hands waxed feeble*, which intimates that that proud and daring prince shall, in the day of his distress, be as weak and dispirited as the meanest Israelites were in the day of their distress.

(4.) That they shall be as much hurt as frightened, for the invader shall come up like a lion to tear and destroy (v. 44) and shall make them and their habitation desolate (v. 45), and the desolation shall be so astonishing that all the nations about shall be terrified by it, v. 46. These three verses we had before (ch. xlix. 19—21) in the prophecy of the destruction of Edom, which was accomplished by the Chaldeans, and they are here repeated, *mutatis mutandis*—with a few necessary alterations, in the prophecy of the destruction of Babylon, which was to be accomplished upon the Chaldeans, to show that though the distributions of Providence may appear unequal for a time its retributions will be equal at last; when thou shalt make an end to spoil thou shalt be spoiled, Isa. xxxiii. 1; Rev. xiii. 10.

## CHAP. LI.

The prophet, in this chapter, goes on with the prediction of Babylon's fall, to which other prophets also bore witness. He is very copious and lively in describing the foresight God had given him of it, for the encouragement of the pious captives, whose deliverance depended upon it and was to be the result of it. Mark is, 1. The record of Babylon's doom, with the particulars of it, intermingled with the grounds of God's controversy with her, many apprehensions of her fall, and great encouragements given them in the word of God, that suffered such hard things by her, ver. 1—46. 2. The representation and ratification of this by the showing of a copy of this prophecy into the river Euphrates, ver. 47—48.

THUS saith the Lord; Behold, I will rise up against Babylon, and against them that dwell in the midst of them that rise up against me, a destroying wind; 2 And will send unto Babylon fanners, that shall fan her, and shall empty her land: for in the day of trouble they shall be against her round about. 3 Against him that bendeth let the archer bend his bow, and against him that lifteth himself up in his brigandine: and spare ye not her young men; destroy ye utterly

all her host. 4 Thus the slain shall fall in the land of the Chaldeans, and *they that are* thrust through in her streets. 5 For Israel *hath not been* forsaken, nor Judah of his God, of the LORD of hosts; though their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel. 6 Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and deliver every man his soul: be not cut off in her iniquity; for this *is* the time of the LORD's vengeance; he will render unto her a recompence. 7 Babylon *hath been* a golden cup in the LORD's hand, that made all the earth drunken: the nations have drunken of her wine; therefore the nations are mad. 8 Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed: howl for her; take balm for her pain, if so be she may be healed. 9 We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed: forsake her, and let us go every one into his own country: for her judgment reacheth unto heaven, and is lifted up *even* to the skies. 10 The LORD hath brought forth our righteousness: come, and let us declare in Zion the work of the LORD our God. 11 Make bright the arrows; gather the shields: the LORD hath raised up the spirit of the kings of the Medes: for his device *is* against Babylon, to destroy it; because it *is* the vengeance of the LORD, the vengeance of his temple. 12 Set up the standard upon the walls of Babylon, make the watch strong, set up the watchmen, prepare the ambushes: for the LORD hath both devised and done that which he spake against the inhabitants of Babylon. 13 O thou that dwellest upon many waters, abundant in treasures, thine end is come, and the measure of thy covetousness. 14 The LORD of hosts hath sworn by himself, *saying*, Surely I will fill thee with men, as with caterpillers; and they shall lift up a shout against thee. 15 He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heaven by his understanding. 16 When he uttereth *his* voice, *there is* a multitude of waters in the heavens; and he causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth: he maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures. 17 Every man is brutish by *his* knowledge; every founder is confounded by the graven image: for his molten image *is* falsehood, and *there is* no breath in them. 18 They *are* vanity, the work of errors: in the time of their visitation they shall perish. 19 The portion of Jacob *is* not like them: for he *is* the former of all things: and *Israel is* the rod of his inheritance: the LORD of hosts *is* his name. 20 Thou *art* my battle-ax and weapons of war: for with thee will I break in pieces the nations, and with thee will I destroy kingdoms; 21 And with thee will I break in pieces the horse and his rider; and with thee will I break in pieces the chariot and his rider; 22 With thee also will I break in pieces man and woman; and with thee will I break in pieces old and young; and with thee will I break in pieces the young man and the maid; 23 I will also break in pieces with thee the shepherd and his flock; and with thee will I break in pieces the husbandman and his yoke of oxen; and with thee will I break in pieces captains and rulers. 24 And I will render unto Babylon and to all the inhabitants of Chaldea all their evil that they have done in Zion, in your sight, saith the LORD. 25 Behold, I *am* against thee, O destroying mountain, saith the LORD, which destroyest all the earth: and I will stretch out mine hand upon thee, and roll thee down from the rocks, and will make thee a burnt mountain. 26 And they shall not take of thee a stone for a corner, nor a stone for foundations; but thou shalt be desolate for ever, saith the LORD. 27 Set ye up a standard in the land, blow the trumpet among the nations, prepare the nations against her, call together against her the kingdoms of Ararat, Minni, and Ashchenaz; appoint a captain against her; cause the horses to come up as the rough caterpillers. 28 Prepare against her the nations with the kings



of the Medes, the captains thereof, and all the rulers thereof, and all the land of his dominion. 29 And the land shall tremble and sorrow: for every purpose of the LORD shall be performed against Babylon, to make the land of Babylon a desolation without an inhabitant. 30 The mighty men of Babylon have forborne to fight, they have remained in *their* holds: their might hath failed; they became as women: they have burned her dwelling-places; her bars are broken. 31 One post shall run to meet another, and one messenger to meet another, to show the king of Babylon that his city is taken at *one* end. 32 And that the passages are stopped, and the reeds they have burned with fire, and the men of war are affrighted. 33 For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; The daughter of Babylon *is* like a threshing-floor, *it is* time to thresh her: yet a little while, and the time of her harvest shall come. 34 Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon hath devoured me, he hath crushed me, he hath made me an empty vessel, he hath swallowed me up like a dragon, he hath filled his belly with my delicates, he hath cast me out. 35 The violence done to me and to my flesh *be* upon Babylon, shall the inhabitant of Zion say; and my blood upon the inhabitants of Chaldea, shall Jerusalem say. 36 Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will plead thy cause, and take vengeance for thee; and I will dry up her sea, and make her springs dry. 37 And Babylon shall become heaps, a dwelling-place for dragons, an astonishment, and a hissing, without an inhabitant. 38 They shall roar together like lions: they shall yell as lions' whelps. 39 In their heat I will make their feasts, and I will make them drunken, that they may rejoice, and sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith the LORD. 40 I will bring them down like lambs to the slaughter, like rams with he-goats. 41 How is Sheshach taken! and how is the praise of the whole earth surprised! how is Babylon become an

astonishment among the nations! 42 The sea is come up upon Babylon: she is covered with the multitude of the waves thereof. 43 Her cities are a desolation, a dry land, and a wilderness, a land wherein no man dwelleth, neither doth *any* son of man pass thereby. 44 And I will punish Bel in Babylon, and I will bring forth out of his mouth that which he hath swallowed up: and the nations shall not flow together any more unto him: yea, the wall of Babylon shall fall. 45 My people, go ye out of the midst of her, and deliver ye every man his soul from the fierce anger of the LORD. 46 And lest your heart faint, and ye fear for the rumour that shall be heard in the land; a rumour shall both come *one* year, and after that in *another* year *shall come* a rumour, and violence in the land, ruler against ruler. 47 Therefore, behold, the days come, that I will do judgment upon the graven images of Babylon: and her whole land shall be confounded, and all her slain shall fall in the midst of her. 48 Then the heaven and the earth, and all that *is* therein, shall sing for Babylon: for the spoilers shall come unto her from the north, saith the LORD. 49 As Babylon *hath caused* the slain of Israel to fall, so at Babylon shall fall the slain of all the earth. 50 Ye that have escaped the sword, go away, stand not still: remember the LORD afar off, and let Jerusalem come into your mind. 51 We are confounded, because we have heard reproach: shame hath covered our faces: for strangers are come into the sanctuaries of the LORD's house. 52 Wherefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will do judgment upon her graven images: and through all her land the wounded shall groan. 53 Though Babylon should mount up to heaven, and though she should fortify the height of her strength, *yet* from me shall spoilers come unto her, saith the LORD. 54 A sound of a cry *cometh* from Babylon, and great destruction from the land of the Chal-

deans: 55 Because the LORD hath spoiled Babylon, and destroyed out of her the great voice; when her waves do roar like great waters, a noise of their voice is uttered: 56 Because the spoiler is come upon her, even upon Babylon, and her mighty men are taken, every one of their bows is broken: for the LORD God of recompences shall surely requite. 57 And I will make drunk her princes, and her wise *men*, her captains, and her rulers, and her mighty men: and they shall sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith the king, whose name is the LORD of hosts. 58 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly broken, and her high gates shall be burned with fire; and the people shall labour in vain, and the folk in the fire, and they shall be weary.

The particulars of this copious prophecy are dispersed and interwoven, and the same things left and returned to so often that it could not well be divided into parts, but we must endeavour to collect them under their proper heads. Let us then observe here,

I. An acknowledgment of the great pomp and power that Babylon had been in and the use that God in his providence had made of it (v. 7): *Babylon hath been a golden cup, a rich and glorious empire, a golden city* (Isa. xiv. 4), *a head of gold* (Dan. ii. 38), filled with all good things, as a cup with wine. Nay, she had been a *golden cup in the Lord's hand*; he had in a particular manner filled and favoured her with blessings; he had made the earth *drunk with this cup*: some were intoxicated with her pleasures and debauched by her, others intoxicated with her terrors and destroyed by her. In both senses the New-Testament Babylon is said to have made the kings of the earth drunk, Rev. xvii. 2; xviii. 3. Babylon had also been God's *battle-axe*; it was so at this time, when Jeremiah prophesied, and was likely to be yet more so, v. 20. The forces of Babylon were God's *weapons of war*, tools in his hand, with which he broke in pieces, and knocked down, *nations and kingdoms,—horses and chariots*, which are so much the strength of kingdoms (v. 21),—*man and woman, young and old*, with which kingdoms are replenished (v. 22),—*the shepherd and his flock, the husbandman and his oxen*, with which kingdoms are maintained and supplied, v. 23. Such havoc as this the Chaldeans had made when God employed them as instruments of his wrath for the chastising of the nations; and yet now Babylon itself must fall. Note, Those that have car-

ried all before them a great while will yet at length meet with their match, and their day also will come to fall; the rod will itself be thrown into the fire at last. Nor can any think it will exempt them from God's judgments that they have been instrumental in executing his judgments on others.

II. A just complaint made of Babylon, and a charge drawn up against her by the Israel of God. 1. She is complained of for her incorrigible wickedness (v. 9): *We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed*. The people of God that were captives among the Babylonians endeavoured, according to the instructions given them (Jer. x. 11), to convince them of the folly of their idolatry, but they could not do it; still they doted as much as ever upon their graven images, and therefore the Israelites resolved to quit them and go to their own country. Yet some understand this as spoken by the forces they had hired for their assistance, declaring that they had done their best to save her from ruin, but that it was all to no purpose, and therefore they might as well go home to their respective countries; "for her judgment reaches unto heaven, and it is in vain to withstand it or think to avert it." 2. She is complained of for her inveterate malice against Israel. Other nations had been hardly used by the Chaldeans, but Israel only complains to God of it, and with confidence appeals to him (v. 34, 35): "*The king of Babylon has devoured me, and crushed me, and never thought he could do enough to ruin me; he has emptied me of all that was valuable, has swallowed me up as a dragon, or whale, swallows up the little fish by shoals; he has filled his belly, filled his treasures, with my delicacies, with all my pleasant things, and has cast me out, cast me away as a vessel in which there is no pleasure*; and now let them be accountable for all this." *Zion and Jerusalem shall say, "Let the violence done to me and my children, that are my own flesh, and pieces of myself, and all the blood of my people, which they have shed like water, be upon them; let the guilt of it lie upon them, and let it be required at their hands."* Note, Ruin is not far off from those that lie under the guilt of wrong done to God's people.

III. Judgment given upon this appeal by the righteous Judge of heaven and earth, on behalf of Israel against Babylon. He sits in the throne judging right, is ready to receive complaints, and answers (v. 36): "*I will plead thy cause*. Leave it with me; I will in due time plead it effectually and take vengeance for thee, and every drop of Jerusalem's blood shall be accounted for with interest." Israel and Judah seemed to have been neglected and forgotten, but God had an eye to them, v. 5. It is true *their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel*. They were a provoking people and their sins were a great offence to God, as a



holy God, and as their God, their Holy One; and therefore he justly delivered them up into the hands of their enemies, and might justly have abandoned them and left them to perish in their hands; but God deals better with them than they deserve, and, notwithstanding their iniquities and his severities, *Israel is not forsaken*, is not cast off, though he be cast out, but is owned and looked after by his God, by the Lord of hosts. God is his God still, and will act for him as the Lord of hosts, a God of power. Note, Though God's people may have broken his laws and fallen under his rebukes, yet it does not therefore follow that they are thrown out of covenant; but God's care of them and love to them will flourish again, Ps. lxxxix. 30—33. The Chaldeans thought they should never be called to an account for what they had done against God's Israel; but there is a time fixed for vengeance, v. 6. We cannot expect it should come sooner than the time fixed, but then it will come; he will render unto Babylon a recompence, for the avenging of Israel is the vengeance of the Lord, who espouses their cause; it is the vengeance of his temple, v. 11, as before, ch. i. 28. The Lord God of recompences, the God to whom vengeance belongs, will surely requite (v. 56), will pay them home; he will render unto Babylon all the evil they have done in Zion (v. 24); he will return it in the sight of his people. They shall have the satisfaction to see their cause pleaded with jealousy. They shall not only live to see those judgments brought upon Babylon, but they shall plainly see them to be the punishment of the wrong they have done to Zion; any man may see it, and say, *Verily there is a God that judges in the earth*; for just as Babylon has caused the slain of Israel to fall, has not only slain those that were found in arms, but all without distinction, even all the land (almost all were put to the sword), so at Babylon shall fall the slain not only of the city, but of all the country, v. 49. Cyrus shall measure to the Chaldeans the same that they measured to the Jews, so that every observer may discern that God is recompensing them for what they did against his people; but Zion's children shall in a particular manner triumph in it (v. 10): *The Lord has brought forth our righteousness*; he has appeared in our behalf against those that dealt unjustly with us, and has given us redress; he has also made it to appear that he is reconciled to us and that we are yet in his eyes a righteous nation. Let it therefore be spoken of to his praise: *Come and let us declare in Zion the work of the Lord our God*, that others may be invited to join with us in praising him.

IV. A declaration of the greatness and sovereignty of that God who espouses Zion's cause and undertakes to reckon with this proud and potent enemy, v. 14. It is the Lord of hosts that has said it, that has sworn

it, has sworn it by himself (for he could swear by no greater), that he will fill Babylon with vast and incredible numbers of the enemy's forces, will fill it with men as with caterpillars, that shall overpower it with multitudes, and need only to lift up a shout against it, for that shall be so terrible as to dispirit all the inhabitants and make them an easy prey to this numerous army. But who, and where, is he that can break so powerful a kingdom as Babylon? The prophet gives an account of him from the description he had formerly given of him, and of his sovereignty and victory over all pretenders (Jer. x. 12—16), which was there intended for the conviction of the Babylonian idolaters and the confirmation of God's Israel in the faith and worship of the God of Israel; and it is here repeated to show that God will convince those by his judgments who would not be convinced by his word that he is God over all. Let not any doubt but that he who has determined to destroy Babylon is able to make his words good, for, 1. He is the God that made the world (v. 15), and therefore nothing is too hard for him to do; it is in his name that our help stands, and on him our hope is built. 2. He has the command of all the creatures that he has made (v. 16); his providence is a continued creation. He has wind and rain at his disposal. If he speak the word, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens (and it is a wonder how they hang there), fed by vapours out of the earth, and it is a wonder how they ascend thence. Lightnings and rain seem contraries, as fire and water, and yet they are produced together; and the wind, which seems arbitrary in its motions, and we know not whence it comes, is yet, we are sure, brought out of his treasures. 3. The idols that oppose the accomplishment of his word are a mere sham and their worshippers brutish people, v. 17, 18. The idols are falsehood, they are vanity, they are the work of errors; when they come to be visited (to be examined and enquired into) they perish, that is, their reputation sinks and they appear to be nothing; and those that make them are like unto them. But between the God of Israel and these gods of the heathen there is no comparison (v. 19): *The portion of Jacob is not like them*; the God who speaks this and will do it is the former of all things and the Lord of all hosts, and therefore can do what he will; and there is a near relation between him and his people, for he is their portion and they are his; they put a confidence in him as their portion and he is pleased to take a complacency in them and a particular care of them as the lot of his inheritance; and therefore he will do what is best for them. The repetition of these things here, which were said before, intimates both the certainty and the importance of them, and obliges us to take special notice of them

God hath spoken once; yea, twice have we heard this, that power belongs to God, power to destroy the most formidable enemies of his church; and if God thus speak once, yea, twice, we are inexcusable if we do not perceive it and attend to it.

V. A description of the instruments that are to be employed in this service. God has raised up the spirit of the kings of the Medes (v. 11), Darius and Cyrus, who come against Babylon by a divine instinct; for God's device is against Babylon to destroy it. They do it, but God devised it, he designed it; they are but accomplishing his purpose, and acting as he directed. Note, God's counsel shall stand, and according to it all hearts shall move. Those whom God employs against Babylon are compared (v. 1) to a destroying wind, which either by its coldness blasts the fruits of the earth or by its fierceness blows down all before it. This wind is brought out of God's treasures (v. 16), and it is here said to be raised up against those that dwell in the midst of the Chaldeans, those of other nations that inhabit among them and are incorporated with them. The Chaldeans rise up against God by falling down before idols, and against them God will raise up destroyers, for he will be too hard for those that contend with him. These enemies are compared to fanners (v. 2), who shall drive them away as chaff is driven away by the fan. The Chaldeans had been fanners to winnow God's people (ch. xv. 7) and to empty them, and now they shall themselves be in like manner despoiled and dispersed.

VI. An ample commission given them to destroy and lay all waste. Let them bend their bow against the archers of the Chaldeans (v. 3) and not spare her young men, but utterly destroy them, for the Lord has both devised and done what he spoke against Babylon, v. 12. This may animate the instruments he employs, by assuring them of success. The methods they take are such as God has devised and therefore they shall surely prosper; what he has spoken shall be done, for he himself will do it; and therefore let all necessary preparations be made. This they are called to, v. 27, 28. Let a standard be set up, under which to enlist soldiers for this expedition; let a trumpet be blown to call men together to it and animate them in it; let the nations, out of which Cyrus's army is to be raised, prepare their recruits; let the kingdoms of Ararat, and Minni, and Ashkenaz, of Armenia, both the higher and the lower, and of Ascania, about Phrygia and Bithynia, send in their quota of men for his service; let general officers be appointed and the cavalry advance; let the horses come up in great numbers, as the caterpillars, and come, like them, leaping and pawing in the valley; let them lay the country waste, as caterpillars do (Joel i. 4), especially rough caterpillars; let the kings and captains prepare nations against Babylon, for

the service is great and there is occasion for many hands to be employed it.

VII. The weakness of the Chaldeans, and their inability to make head against this threatening destroying force. When God employed them against other nations they had spirit and strength to act offensively, and went on with admirable resolution, conquering and to conquer; but now that it comes to their turn to be reckoned with all their might and courage are gone, their hearts fail them, and none of all their men of might and mettle have found their hands to act so much as defensively. They are called upon here to prepare for action, but it is ironically and in an upbraiding way (v. 11): *Make bright the arrows*, which have grown rusty through disuse; *gather the shields*, which in a long time of peace and security have been scattered and thrown out of the way (v. 12); *set up the standard upon the walls of Babylon*, upon the towers on those walls, to summon all that owed suit and service to that mother-city, now to come in to her assistance; let them make the watch as strong as they can, and appoint the sentinels to their respective posts, and prepare ambushes for the reception of the enemy. This intimates that they would be found very secure and remiss, and would need to be thus quickened (and they were so to such a degree that they were in the midst of their revels when the city was taken), but that all their preparations should be to no purpose. Whoever will may call them to it, but they shall have no heart to come at the call, v. 29. *The whole land shall tremble, and sorrow* (a universal consternation) shall seize upon them; for they shall see both the irresistible arm and the irreversible counsel and decree of God against them. They shall see that God is making *Babylon a desolation*, and therein is performing what he has purposed; and then *the mighty men of Babylon have forborne to fight*, v. 30. God having taken away their strength and spirit, so that they have remained in their holds, not daring so much as to peep forth, the might both of their hearts and of their hands fails; they become as timorous as women, so that the enemy has, without any resistance, burnt her dwelling-places and broken her bars. It is to the same purport with e. 56—58. When the spoiler comes upon Babylon her mighty men, who should make head against him, are immediately taken, their weapons of war fail them, every one of their bows is broken and stands them in no stead. Their politics fail them; they call councils of war, but their princes and captains, who sit in council to concert measures for the common safety, are made drunk; they are as men intoxicated through stupidity or despair; they can form no right notions of things; they stagger and are unsteady in their counsels and resolves, and dash one against another, and, like drunken men, fall out among themselves. At length



they sleep a perpetual sleep, and never awake from their wine, the wine of God's wrath, for it is to them an opiate that lays them into a fatal lethargy. The walls of their city fail them, v. 58. When the enemy had found ways to ford Euphrates, which was thought impassable, yet surely, think they, the walls are impregnable, they are the broad walls of Babylon or (as the margin reads it), the walls of broad Babylon. The compass of the city, within the walls, was 385 furlongs, some say 480, that is, about sixty miles; the walls were 200 cubits high, and fifty cubits broad, so that two chariots might easily pass by one another upon them. Some say that there was a threefold wall about the inner city and the like about the outer, and that the stones of the wall, being laid in pitch instead of mortar (Gen. xi. 3), were scarcely separable; and yet these shall be utterly broken, and the high gates and towers shall be burnt, and the people that are employed in the defence of the city shall labour in vain in the fire; they shall quite tire themselves, but shall do no good.

VIII. The destruction that shall be made of Babylon by these invaders. 1. It is a certain destruction; the doom has passed and it cannot be reversed; a divine power is engaged against it, which cannot be resisted (v. 8): *Babylon is fullen and destroyed*, is as sure to fall, to fall into destruction, as if it were fallen and destroyed already; though when Jeremiah prophesied this, and many a year after, it was in the height of its power and greatness. God declares, God appears against Babylon (v. 25): *Behold, I am against thee*; and those cannot stand long whom God is against. He will stretch out his hand upon it, a hand which no creature can bear the weight of nor withstand the force of. It is his purpose, which shall be performed, that Babylon must be a desolation, v. 29. 2. It is a righteous destruction. Babylon has made herself meet for it, and therefore cannot fail to meet with it. For (v. 25) *Babylon has been a destroying mountain*, very lofty and bulky as a mountain, and *destroying all the earth*, as the stones that are tumbled from high mountains spoil the grounds about them; but now it shall itself be rolled down from its rocks, which were as the foundations on which it stood. It shall be levelled, its pomp and power broken. It is now a burning mountain, like *Ætna* and the other volcanoes, that throw out fire, to the terror of all about them. But it shall be a burnt mountain; it shall at length have consumed itself, and shall remain a heap of ashes. So will this world be at the end of time. Again (v. 33), "*Babylon is like a threshing-floor*, in which the people of God have been long threshed, as sheaves in the floor; but now the time has come that she shall herself be threshed and her sheaves in her; her princes and great men, and all her inhabitants, shall be beaten in their own land, as in the thresh-

ing-floor. The threshing-floor is prepared. Babylon is by sin made meet to be a seat of war, and her people, like corn in harvest, are ripe for destruction," Rev. xiv. 15; Mic. iv. 12. 3. It is an unavoidable destruction. Babylon seems to be well-fenced and fortified against it: *She dwells upon many waters* (v. 13); the situation of her country is such that it seems inaccessible, it is so surrounded, and the march of an enemy into it so embarrassed, by rivers. In allusion to this, the New-Testament Babylon is said to sit upon many waters, that is, to rule over many nations, as the other Babylon did, Rev. xvii. 15. *Babylon is abundant in treasures*; and yet "*thy end has come*, and neither thy waters nor thy wealth shall secure thee." This end that comes shall be the measure of thy covetousness; it shall be the stint of thy gettings, it shall set bounds to thy ambition and avarice, which otherwise would have been boundless. God, by the destruction of Babylon, said to its proud waves, *Hitherto shall you come, and no further*. Note, If men will not set a measure to their covetousness by wisdom and grace, God will set a measure to it by his judgments. Babylon, thinking herself very safe and very great, was very proud; but she will be deceived (v. 53): *Though Babylon should mount her walls and palaces up to heaven*, and though (because what is high is apt to totter) she should take care to fortify the height of her strength, yet all will not do; God will send spoilers against her, that shall break through her strength and bring down her height. 4. It is a gradual destruction, which, if they had pleased, they might have foreseen and had warning of; for (v. 46) "*A rumour will come one year that Cyrus is making vast preparations for war, and after that, in another year, shall come a rumour that his design is upon Babylon*, and he is steering his course that way;" so that when he was a great way off they might have sent and desired conditions of peace; but they were too proud, too secure, to do that, and their hearts were hardened to their destruction. 5. Yet, when it comes, it is a surprising destruction: *Babylon has suddenly fallen* (v. 8); the destruction came upon them when they did not think of it and was perfected in a little time, as that of the New-Testament Babylon—in one hour, Rev. xviii. 17. The king of Babylon, who should have been observing the approaches of the enemy, was himself at such a distance from the place where the attack was made that it was a great while ere he had notice that the city was taken; so that those who were posted near the place sent one messenger, one courier, after another, with advice of it, v. 31. The foot-posts shall meet at the court from several quarters with this intelligence to the king of Babylon that his city is taken at one end, and there is nothing to obstruct the progress of the conquerors, but they will be at the other end quickly. They are to tell

him that the enemy has seized the passes (v. 32), the forts or blockades upon the river, and that, having got over the river, he has set fire to the reeds on the river side, to alarm and terrify the city, so that all the men of war are affrighted and have thrown down their arms and surrendered at discretion. The messengers come, like Job's, one upon the heels of another, with these tidings, which are immediately confirmed with a witness by the enemies' being in the palace and slaying the king himself, Dan. v. 30. That profane feast which they were celebrating at the very time when the city was taken, which was both an evidence of their strange security and a great advantage to the enemy, seems here to be referred to (v. 38, 39): *They shall roar together like lions, as men in their revels do, when the wine has got into their heads. They call it singing; but in scripture-language, and in the language of sober men, it is called yelling like lions' whelps.* It is probable that they were drinking confusion to Cyrus and his army with loud huzzas. Well, says God, in their heat, when they are inflamed (Isa. v. 11) and their heads are hot with hard drinking, I will make their feasts, I will give them their portion. They have passed their cup round; now the cup of the Lord's right hand shall be turned unto them (Hab. ii. 15, 16), a cup of fury, which shall make them drunk that they may rejoice (or rather that they may revel it) and sleep a perpetual sleep; let them be as merry as they can with that bitter cup, but it shall lay them to sleep never to wake more (as v. 57); for on that night, in the midst of the jollity, was Belshazzar slain. 6. It is to be a universal destruction. God will make thorough work of it; for, as he will perform what he has purposed, so he will perfect what he has begun. *The slain shall fall in great abundance throughout the land of the Chaldeans; multitudes shall be thrust through in her streets, v. 4.* They are brought down like lambs to the slaughter (v. 40), in such great numbers, so easily, and the enemies make no more of killing them than the butcher does of killing lambs. The strength of the enemy, and their invading them, are here compared to an irruption and inundation of waters (v. 42): *The sea has come up upon Babylon, which, when it has once broken through its bounds, there is no fence against, so that she is covered with the multitude of its waves, overpowered by a numerous army; her cities then become a desolation, an uninhabited uncultivated desert, v. 43.* 7. It is a destruction that shall reach the gods of Babylon, the idols and images, and fall with a particular weight upon them. "In token that the whole land shall be confounded and all her slain shall fall, and that throughout all the country the wounded shall groan, I will do judgment upon her graven images," v. 47 and again v. 52. All must needs perish if their gods perish, from whom

they expect protection. Though the invaders are themselves idolaters, yet they shall destroy the images and temples of the gods of Babylon, as an earnest of the abolishing of all counterfeit deities. Bel was the principal idol that the Babylonians worshipped, and therefore that is by name here marked for destruction (v. 44): *I will punish Bel, that great devourer, that image to which such abundance of sacrifices are offered and such rich spoils dedicated, and to whose temple there is such a vast resort. He shall disgorge what he has so greedily regaled himself with. God will bring forth out of his temple all the wealth laid up there, Job xx. 15. His altars shall be forsaken, none shall regard him any more, and so that idol which was thought to be a wall to Babylon shall fall and fail them. 8. It shall be a final destruction. You may take balm for her pain, but in vain; she that would not be healed by the word of God shall not be healed by his providence, v. 8, 9. Babylon shall become heaps (v. 37), and, to complete its infamy, no use shall be made even of the ruins of Babylon, so execrable shall they be, and attended with such ill omens (v. 26): *They shall not take of thee a stone for a corner, nor a stone for foundations.* People shall not care for having any thing to do with Babylon, or whatever belonged to it. Or it denotes that there shall be nothing left in Babylon on which to ground any hopes or attempts of raising it into a kingdom again; for, as it follows here, *it shall be desolate for ever.* St. Jerome says that in his time, though the ruins of Babylon's walls were to be seen, yet the ground enclosed by them was a forest of wild beasts.*

IX. Here is a call to God's people to go out of Babylon. It is their wisdom, when the ruin is approaching, to quit the city and retire into the country (v. 6): "*Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and get into some remote corner, that you may save your lives, and may not be cut off in her iniquity.*" When God's judgments are abroad it is good to get as far as we can from those against whom they are levelled, as Israel from the tents of Korah. This agrees with the advice Christ gave his disciples, with reference to the destruction of Jerusalem. *Let those who shall be in Judea flee to the mountains, Matt. xxiv. 16.* It is their wisdom to get out of the midst of Babylon, lest they be involved, if not in her ruins, yet in her fears (v. 45, 46): *Lest your heart faint, and you fear for the rumour that shall be heard in the land.* Though God had told them that Cyrus should be their deliverer, and Babylon's destruction their deliverance, yet they had been told also that in the peace thereof they should have peace, and therefore the alarms given to Babylon would put them into a fright, and perhaps they might not have faith and consideration enough to suppress those fears, for which reason they are here advised to



get out of the hearing of the alarms. Note, Those who have not grace enough to keep their temper in temptation should have wisdom enough to keep out of the way of temptation. But this is not all; it is not only their wisdom to quit the city when the ruin is approaching, but it is their duty to quit the country too when the ruin is accomplished, and they are set at liberty by the pulling down of the prison over their heads. This they are told, v. 50, 51: "*You Israelites, who have escaped the sword of the Chaldeans your oppressors, and of the Persians their destroyers, now that the year of release has come, go away, stand not still; hasten to your own country again, however you may be comfortably seated in Babylon, for this is not your rest, but Canaan is.*" 1. He puts them in mind of the inducements they had to return: "*Remember the Lord afar off, his presence with you now, though you are here afar off from your native soil; his presence with your fathers formerly in the temple, though you are now afar off from the ruins of it.*" Note, Wherever we are, in the greatest depths, at the greatest distances, we may and must remember the Lord our God; and in the time of the greatest fears and hopes it is seasonable to *remember the Lord*. "And let Jerusalem come into your mind. Though it be now in ruins, yet *favour its dust* (Ps. cii. 14); though few of you ever saw it, yet believe the report you have had concerning it from those that *wept when they remembered Zion*; and think of Jerusalem until you come up to a resolution to make the best of your way thither." Note, When the city of our solemnities is out of sight, yet it must not be out of mind; and it will be of great use to us, in our journey through this world, to let the heavenly Jerusalem come often into our mind. 2. He takes notice of the discouragement which the returning captives labour under (v. 51); being reminded of Jerusalem, they cry out, "*We are confounded; we cannot bear the thought of it; shame covers our faces* at the mention of it, *for we have heard of the reproach of the sanctuary*, that is profaned and ruined by strangers; how can we think of it with any pleasure?" To this he answers (v. 52) that the God of Israel will now triumph over the gods of Babylon, and so that reproach will be for ever rolled away. Note, The believing prospect of Jerusalem's recovery will keep us from being ashamed of Jerusalem's ruins.

X. Here is the diversified feeling excited by Babylon's fall, and it is the same that we have with respect to the *New-Testament Babylon*, Rev. xviii. 9, 19. 1. Some shall lament the destruction of Babylon. There is the sound of a cry, a great outcry coming from Babylon (v. 54), lamenting this great destruction, the voice of mourning, because the Lord has *destroyed the voice* of the multitude, that great voice of mirth which used

to be heard in Babylon, v. 55. We are told what they shall say in their lamentations (v. 41): "*How is Sheshach taken, and how are we mistaken concerning her! How is that city surprised and become an astonishment among the nations that was the praise, and glory, and admiration of the whole earth!*" See how that may fall into a general contempt which has been universally cried up. 2. Yet some shall rejoice in Babylon's fall, not as it is the misery of their fellow-creatures, but as it is the manifestation of the righteous judgment of God and as it opens the way for the release of God's captives; upon these accounts the *heaven and the earth, and all that is in both, shall sing for Babylon* (v. 48); the church in heaven and the church on earth shall give to God the glory of his righteousness, and take notice of it with thankfulness to his praise. Babylon's ruin is Zion's praise.

59 The word which Jeremiah the prophet commanded Seraiah the son of Neriah, the son of Maaseiah, when he went with Zedekiah the king of Judah into Babylon in the fourth year of his reign. And *this Seraiah was a quiet prince*. 60 So Jeremiah wrote in a book all the evil that should come upon Babylon, *even all these words that are written against Babylon*. 61 And Jeremiah said to Seraiah, When thou comest to Babylon, and shalt see, and shalt read all these words; 62 Then shalt thou say, O Lord, thou hast spoken against this place, to cut it off, that none shall remain in it, neither man nor beast, but that it shall be desolate for ever. 63 And it shall be, when thou hast made an end of reading this book, *that thou shalt bind a stone to it, and cast it into the midst of Euphrates*: 64 And thou shalt say, Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise from the evil that I will bring upon her: and they shall be weary. Thus far are the words of Jeremiah.

We have been long attending the judgment of Babylon in this and the foregoing chapter; now here we have the conclusion of that whole matter. 1. A copy is taken of this prophecy, it should seem by Jeremiah himself, for Baruch his scribe is not mentioned here (v. 60): *Jeremiah wrote in a book all these words that are here written against Babylon*. He received this notice that he might give it to all whom it might concern. It is of great advantage both to the propagating and to the perpetuating of the word of God to have it written, and to have copies taken

of the law, prophets, and epistles. 2. It is sent to Babylon, to the captives there, by the hand of Seraiah, who went there attendant on or ambassador for king Zedekiah, in the fourth year of his reign, v. 59. He went with Zedekiah, or (as the margin reads it) on the behalf of Zedekiah, into Babylon. The character given of him is observable, that this Seraiah was a quiet prince, a prince of rest. He was in honour and power, but not, as most of the princes then were, hot and heady, making parties, and heading factions, and driving things furiously. He was of a calm temper, studied the things that made for peace, endeavoured to preserve a good understanding between the king his master and the king of Babylon, and to keep his master from rebelling. He was no persecutor of God's prophets, but a moderate man. Zedekiah was happy in the choice of such a man to be his envoy to the king of Babylon, and Jeremiah might safely entrust such a man with his errand too. Note, It is the real honour of great men to be quiet men, and it is the wisdom of princes to put such into places of trust. 3. Seraiah is desired to read it to his countrymen that had already gone into captivity: "When thou shalt come to Babylon, and shalt see what a magnificent place it is, how large a city, how strong, how rich, and how well fortified, and shalt therefore be tempted to think, Surely, it will stand for ever" (as the disciples, when they observed the buildings of the temple, concluded that nothing would throw them down but the end of the world, Matt. xxiv. 3), "then thou shalt read all these words to thyself and thy particular friends, for their encouragement in their captivity: let them with an eye of faith see to the end of these threatening powers, and comfort themselves and one another herewith." 4. He is directed to make a solemn protestation of the divine authority and unquestionable certainty of that which he had read (v. 62): *Then thou shalt look up to God, and say, O Lord! it is thou that hast spoken against this place, to cut it off.* This is like the angel's protestation concerning the destruction of the New-Testament Babylon. *These are the true sayings of God*, Rev. xix. 9. *These words are true and faithful*, Rev. xxi. 5. Though Seraiah sees Babylon flourishing, having read this prophecy he must foresee Babylon falling, and by virtue of it must curse its habitation, though it be taking root (Job v. 3): "O Lord! thou hast spoken against this place, and I believe what thou hast spoken, that, as thou knowest every thing, so thou canst do every thing. Thou hast passed sentence upon Babylon, and it shall be executed. Thou hast spoken against this place, to cut it off, and therefore we will neither envy its pomp nor fear its power." When we see what this world is, how glittering its shows are and how flattering its proposals, let us read in the book of the Lord that its

*fashion passes away*, and it shall shortly be cut off and be desolate for ever, and we shall learn to look upon it with a holy contempt. Observe here, When we have been reading the word of God it becomes us to direct to him whose word it is a humble believing acknowledgment of the truth, equity, and goodness, of what we have read. 5. He must then tie a stone to the book and throw it into the midst of the river Euphrates, as a confirming sign of the things contained in it, saying, "Thus shall Babylon sink, and not rise; for they shall be weary, they shall perfectly succumb, as men tired with a burden, under the load of the evil that I will bring upon them, which they shall never shake off, nor get from under," v. 53, 64. In the sign it was the stone that sunk the book, which otherwise would have swum. But in the thing signified it was rather the book that sunk the stone; it was the divine sentence passed upon Babylon in this prophecy that sunk that city, which seemed as firm as a stone. The fall of the New-Testament Babylon was represented by something like this, but much more magnificent, Rev. xviii. 21. *A mighty angel cast a great millstone into the sea, saying, Thus shall Babylon fall.* Those that sink under the weight of God's wrath and curse sink irrecoverably. The last words of the chapter seal up the vision and prophecy of this book: *Thus far are the words of Jeremiah.* Not that this prophecy against Babylon was the last of his prophecies; for it was dated in the fourth year of Zedekiah (v. 59), long before he finished his testimony; but this is recorded last of his prophecies because it was to be last accomplished of all his prophecies against the Gentiles, ch. xlii. 1. And the chapter which remains is purely historical, and, as some think, was added by some other hand.

#### CHAP. LII.

History is the best expositor of prophecy; and therefore, for the better understanding of the prophecies of this book, which relate to the destruction of Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah, we are here furnished with an account of that sad event. It is much the same with the history we had 2 Kings xxiv and xxv., and many of the particulars we had before in that book, but the matter is here repeated and put together, to give light to the book of the Lamentations, which follows next, and to serve as a key to it. That article in the close concerning the advancement of Jehoiachin in his captivity, which happened after Jeremiah's time, gives colour to the conjecture of those who suppose that this chapter was not written by Jeremiah himself, but by some man divinely inspired among those in captivity, for a constant memorandum to those who in Babylon preferred Jerusalem above their chief joy. In this chapter we have, I. The bad reign of Zedekiah, very bad in regard both of sin and of punishment, ver. 1-3. II. The besieging and taking of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, ver. 4-7. III. The severe usage which Zedekiah and the princes met with, ver. 8-11. IV. The destruction of the temple and the city, ver. 12-14. V. The captivity of the people (ver. 15, 16) and the numbers of those that were carried away into captivity, ver. 28-30. VI. The carrying off of the plunder of the temple, ver. 17-23. VII. The slaughter of the priests, and some other great men, in cold blood, ver. 24-27. VIII. The better days which king Jehoiachin lived to see in the latter end of his time, after the death of Nebuchadnezzar, ver. 31-34.

**Z**EDEKIAH was one and twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was



Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. 2 And he did *that which was* evil in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. 3 For through the anger of the LORD it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, till he had cast them out from his presence, that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. 4 And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth *day* of the month, *that* Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it, and built forts against it round about. 5 So the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah. 6 And in the fourth month, in the ninth *day* of the month, the famine was sore in the city, so that there was no bread for the people of the land. 7 Then the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled, and went forth out of the city by night by the way of the gate between the two walls, which *was* by the king's garden; (now the Chaldeans *were* by the city round about :) and they went by the way of the plain. 8 But the army of the Chaldeans pursued after the king, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; and all his army was scattered from him. 9 Then they took the king, and carried him up unto the king of Babylon to Riblah in the land of Hamath; where he gave judgment upon him. 10 And the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes: he slew also all the princes of Judah in Riblah. 11 Then he put out the eyes of Zedekiah; and the king of Babylon bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death.

This narrative begins no higher than the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah, though there were two captivities before, one in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, the other in the first of Jeconiah; but probably it was drawn up by some of those that were carried away with Zedekiah, as a reproach to themselves for imagining that they should not go into captivity after their brethren, with which hopes they had long flattered themselves. We have here, 1. God's just displeasure

against Judah and Jerusalem for their sin, v. 3. His anger was against them to such a degree that he determined to *cast them out from his presence*, his favourable gracious presence, as a father, when he is extremely angry with an undutiful son, bids him get out of his presence. He expelled them from that good land that had such tokens of his presence in providential bounty and that holy city and temple that had such tokens of his presence in covenant-grace and love. Note, Those that are banished from God's ordinances have reason to complain that they are in some degree *cast out of his presence*; yet none are cast out from God's gracious presence but those that by sin have first thrown themselves out of it. This fruit of sin we should therefore deprecate above any thing, as David (Ps. li. 11), *Cast me not away from thy presence*. 2. Zedekiah's bad conduct and management, to which God left him, in displeasure against the people, and for which God punished him, in displeasure against him. Zedekiah had arrived at years of discretion when he came to the throne; he was *twenty-one years old* (v. 1); he was none of the worst of the kings (we never read of his idolatries), yet his character is that he *did evil in the eyes of the Lord*, for he did not do the good he should have done. But that evil deed of his which did in a special manner hasten this destruction was his *rebelling against the king of Babylon*, which was both his sin and his folly, and brought ruin upon his people, not only meritoriously, but efficiently. God was greatly displeased with him for his perfidious dealing with the king of Babylon (as we find, Ezek. xvii. 15, &c.); and, because he was angry at Judah and Jerusalem, he put him into the hand of his own counsels, to do that foolish thing which proved fatal to him and his kingdom. 3. The possession which the Chaldeans at length gained of Jerusalem, after eighteen months' siege. They sat down before it, and blocked it up, in the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, in the tenth month (v. 4), and made themselves masters of it in the *eleventh year in the fourth month*, v. 6. In remembrance of these two steps towards their ruin, while they were in captivity, they kept a *fast in the fourth month*, and a *fast in the tenth* (Zech. viii. 19): that in the *fifth month* was in remembrance of the burning of the temple, and that in the *seventh* of the murder of Gedaliah. We may easily imagine, or rather cannot imagine, what a sad time it was with Jerusalem, during this year and half that it was besieged, when all provisions were cut off from coming to them and they were ever and anon alarmed by the attacks of the enemy, and, being obstinately resolved to hold out to the last extremity, nothing remained but a *certain fearful looking for of judgment*. That which disabled them to hold out, and yet could not prevail with them to capitulate

was the *famine in the city* (v. 6); there was *no bread for the people of the land*, so that the soldiers could not make good their posts, but were rendered wholly unserviceable; and then no wonder that *the city was broken up*, v. 7. Walls, in such a case, will not hold out long without men, any more than men without walls; nor will both together stand people in any stead without God and his protection. 4. The inglorious retreat of the king and his mighty men. They got out of the city *by night* (v. 7) and made the best of their way, I know not whither, nor perhaps they themselves; but the king was overtaken by the pursuers *in the plains of Jericho*, his guards were dispersed, and all his army was *scattered from him*, v. 8. His fright was not causeless, for where there is guilt there will be fear in time of danger: but his flight was fruitless, for there is no escaping the judgments of God; they will *come upon the sinner*, and will *overtake him*, let him flee where he will (Deut. xxviii. 15), and these judgments particularly that are here executed were there threatened, v. 52, 53, &c. 5. The sad doom passed upon Zedekiah by the king of Babylon, and immediately put in execution. He treated him as a rebel, *gave judgment upon him*, v. 9. One cannot think of it without the utmost vexation and regret that a king, a king of Judah, a king of the house of David, should be arraigned as a criminal at the bar of this heathen king. But he *humbled not himself before Jeremiah* the prophet; therefore God thus humbled him. Pursuant to the sentence passed upon him by the haughty conqueror, *his sons were slain before his eyes*, and all the *princes of Judah* (v. 10); then *his eyes were put out*, and he was *bound in chains*, carried in triumph to Babylon; perhaps they made sport with him, as they did with Samson when his eyes were put out; however, he was condemned to perpetual imprisonment, wearing out the remainder of his life (I cannot say his days, for he saw day no more) in darkness and misery. He was kept in prison till the *day of his death*, but had some honour done him at his funeral, ch. xxxiv. 5. Jeremiah had often told him what it would come to, but he would not take warning when he might have prevented it.

12 Now in the fifth month, in the tenth *day* of the month, which was the nineteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzar-adan, captain of the guard, *which* served the king of Babylon, into Jerusalem, 13 And burned the house of the LORD, and the king's house; and all the houses of Jerusalem, and all the houses of the great *men*, burned he with fire: 14 And all the army

of the Chaldeans, that *were* with the captain of the guard, brake down all the walls of Jerusalem round about. 15 Then Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard carried away captive *certain* of the poor of the people, and the residue of the people that remained in the city, and those that fell away, that fell to the king of Babylon, and the rest of the multitude. 16 But Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard left *certain* of the poor of the land for vine-dressers and for husbandmen. 17 Also the pillars of brass that *were* in the house of the LORD, and the bases, and the brasen sea that *was* in the house of the LORD, the Chaldeans brake, and carried all the brass of them to Babylon. 18 The caldrons also, and the shovels, and the snuffers, and the bowls, and the spoons, and all the vessels of brass wherewith they ministered, took they away. 19 And the basons, and the fire-pans, and the bowls, and the caldrons, and the candlesticks, and the spoons, and the cups; *that* which *was* of gold *in* gold, and *that* which *was* of silver *in* silver, took the captain of the guard away. 20 The two pillars, one sea, and twelve brasen bulls that *were* under the bases, which king Solomon had made in the house of the LORD: the brass of all these vessels was without weight. 21 And *concerning* the pillars, the height of one pillar *was* eighteen cubits; and a fillet of twelve cubits did compass it; and the thickness thereof *was* four fingers: *it was* hollow. 22 And a chapter of brass *was* upon it; and the height of one chapter *was* five cubits, with net-work and pomegranates upon the chapters round about, all *of* brass. The second pillar also and the pomegranates *were* like unto these. 23 And there were ninety and six pomegranates on a side; *and* all the pomegranates upon the net-work *were* a hundred round about.

We have here an account of the woeful havoc that was made by the Chaldean army, a month after the city was taken, under the command of Nebuzaradan, who was *captain of the guard*, or general of the army, in this action. In the margin he is called the *chief*



of the slaughter-men, or executioners; for soldiers are but slaughter-men, and God employs them as executioners of his sentence against a sinful people. Nebuzaradan was chief of those soldiers, but, in the execution he did, we have reason to fear he had no eye to God, but he served the king of Babylon and his own designs, now that he came into Jerusalem, into the very bowels of it, as captain of the slaughter-men there. And, 1. He laid the temple in ashes, having first plundered it of every thing that was valuable: He *burnt the house of the Lord*, that holy and beautiful house, where their fathers praised him, Isa. lxiv. 11. 2. He burnt the royal palace, probably that which Solomon built after he had built the temple, which was, ever since, *the king's house*. 3. He burnt *all the houses of Jerusalem*, that is, all the houses of the great men, or those particularly; if any escaped, it was only some sorry cottages for the poor of the land. 4. He *broke down all the walls of Jerusalem*, to be revenged upon them for standing in the way of his army so long. Thus, of a defended city, it was made a ruin, Isa. xxv. 2. 5. He *carried away many into captivity* (v. 15); he took away *certain of the poor of the people*, that is, of the people in the city, for the *poor of the land* (the poor of the country) he left for *vine-dressers and husbandmen*. He also carried off the *residue of the people that remained in the city*, that had escaped the sword and famine, and the deserters, such as he thought fit, or rather such as God thought fit; for he had already determined some for the *pestilence*, some for the *sword*, some for *famine*, and some for *captivity*, ch. xv. 2. But, 6. Nothing is more particularly and largely related here than the carrying away of the appurtenances of the temple. All that were of great value were carried away before, *the vessels of silver and gold*, yet some of that sort remained, which were now carried away, v. 19. But most of the temple-prey that was now seized was of brass, which, being of less value, was carried off last. When the gold was gone, the brass soon went after it, because the people repented not, according to Jeremiah's prediction, ch. xxvii. 19, &c. When the walls of the city were demolished, the pillars of the temple were pulled down too, and both in token that God, who was the strength and stay both of their civil and their ecclesiastical government, had departed from them. No walls can protect those, nor pillars sustain those, from whom God withdraws. These pillars of the temple were not for support (for there was nothing built upon them), but for ornament and significance. They were called *Jachin—He will establish*; and *Boaz—In him is strength*; so that the breaking of these signified that God would no longer establish his house nor be the strength of it. These pillars are here very particularly described (v. 21—23, from 1 Kings vii. 15),

that the extraordinary beauty and stateliness of them may affect us the more with the demolishing of them. All the vessels that belonged to the brazen altar were carried away; for the iniquity of Jerusalem, like that of Eli's house, was not to be purged by sacrifice or offering, 1 Sam. iii. 14. It is said (v. 20), *The brass of all these vessels was without weight*; so it was in the making of them (1 Kings vii. 47), *the weight of the brass was not then found out* (2 Chron. iv. 18), and so it was in the destroying of them. Those that made great spoil of them did not stand to weigh them, as purchasers do, for, whatever they weighed, it was all their own.

24 And the captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest, and Zephaniah the second priest, and the three keepers of the door: 25 He took also out of the city an eunuch, which had the charge of the men of war; and seven men of them that were near the king's person, which were found in the city; and the principal scribe of the host, who mustered the people of the land; and three-score men of the people of the land, that were found in the midst of the city. 26 So Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard took them, and brought them to the king of Babylon to Riblah. 27 And the king of Babylon smote them, and put them to death in Riblah in the land of Hamath. Thus Judah was carried away captive out of his own land. 28 This is the people whom Nebuchadrezzar carried away captive: in the seventh year three thousand Jews and three and twenty: 29 In the eighteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar he carried away captive from Jerusalem eight hundred thirty and two persons: 30 In the three and twentieth year of Nebuchadrezzar Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard carried away captive of the Jews seven hundred forty and five persons: all the persons were four thousand and six hundred.

We have here a very melancholy account, 1. Of the slaughter of some great men, in cold blood, at Riblah, seventy-two in number (according to the number of the elders of Israel, Num. xi. 24, 25), so they are computed, 2 Kings xxv. 18, 19. We read there of five out of the temple, two out of the city, five out of the court, and sixty out of the country. The account here agrees

with that, except in one article; there it is said that there were five, here there were seven, of those that were *near the king*, which Dr. Lightfoot reconciles thus, that he took away seven of those that were near the king, but two of them were Jeremiah himself and Ebed-melech, who were both discharged, as we have read before, so that there were only five of them put to death, and so the number was reduced to seventy-two, some of all ranks, for they had all corrupted their way; and it is probable that such were made examples of as had been most forward to excite and promote the rebellion against the king of Babylon. *Seraiah the chief priest* is put first, whose sacred character could not exempt him from this stroke; how should it, when he himself had profaned it by sin? *Seraiah* the prince was a *quiet prince* (ch. li. 59), but perhaps *Seraiah* the priest was not so, but unquiet and turbulent, by which he had made himself obnoxious to the king of Babylon. The leaders of this people had caused them to err, and now they are in a particular manner made monuments of divine justice. 2. Of the captivity of the rest. Come and see how *Judah was carried away captive out of his own land* (v. 27), and how it spued them out as it spued out the Canaanites that went before them, which God had told them it would certainly do if they trod in their steps and copied out their abominations, Lev. xviii. 28. Now here is an account, (1.) Of two captivities which we had an account of before, one in the seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar (the same with that which is said to be in his eighth year, 2 Kings xxiv. 12), another in his eighteenth year, the same with that which is said (v. 12) to be in his nineteenth year. But the sums here are very small, in comparison with what we find expressed concerning the former (2 Kings xxiv. 14, 16), when there were 18,000 carried captive, whereas here they are said to be 3023; they are also small in comparison with what we may reasonably suppose concerning the latter; for, when all the residue of the people were carried away (v. 15), one would think there should be more than 832 souls; therefore Dr. Lightfoot conjectures that, these accounts being joined to the story of the putting to death of the great men at Riblah, all that are here said to be carried away were *put to death as rebels*. (2.) Of a third captivity, not mentioned before, which was in the twenty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar, four years after the destruction of Jerusalem (v. 30): Then *Nebuzaradan* came, and *carried away 745 Jews*; it is probable that this was done in revenge of the murder of Gedaliah, which was another rebellion against the king of Babylon, and that those who were now taken were aiders and abettors of Ishmael in that murder, and were not only carried away, but put to death for it; yet this is uncertain. If this be the sum

total of the captives (*all the persons were 4600*, v. 30), we may see how strangely they were reduced from what they had been, and may wonder as much how they came to be so numerous again as afterwards we find them; for it should seem that, as at first in Egypt, so again in Babylon, the Lord made them fruitful in the land of their affliction, and the more they were oppressed the more they multiplied. And the truth is, this people were often miracles both of judgment and mercy.

31 And it came to pass in the seven and thirtieth year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, in the five and twentieth day of the month, that Evil-merodach king of Babylon in the first year of his reign lifted up the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah, and brought him forth out of prison, 32 And spake kindly unto him, and set his throne above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon, 33 And changed his prison-garments: and he did continually eat bread before him all the days of his life. 34 And for his diet, there was a continual diet given him of the king of Babylon, every day a portion until the day of his death, all the days of his life.

This passage of story concerning the reviving which king Jehoiachin had in his bondage we had likewise before (2 Kings xxv. 27—30), only there it is said to be done *on the twenty-seventh day of the twelfth month*, here *on the twenty-fifth*; but in a thing of this nature two days make a very slight difference in the account. It is probable that the orders were given for his release on the twenty-fifth day, but that he was not presented to the king till the twenty-seventh. We may observe in this story, 1. That new lords make new laws. Nebuchadnezzar had long kept this unhappy prince in prison; and his son, though well-affected to the prisoner, could not procure him any favour, not one smile, from his father, any more than Jonathan could for David from his father; but, when the old peevish man was dead, his son countenanced Jehoiachin and made him a favourite. It is common for children to undo what their fathers have done; it were well if it were always as much for the better as this was. 2. That the world we live in is a changing world. Jehoiachin, in his beginning, fell from a throne into a prison, but here he is advanced again to a throne of state (v. 32), though not to a throne of power. As, before, the robes were changed into prison-garments, so now they were converted into robes again. Such chequer-work is this world; prosperity



and adversity are set the one over-against the other, that we may learn to *rejoice as though we rejoiced not and weep as though we wept not*. 3. That, though the night of affliction be very long, yet we must not despair but that the day may dawn at last. Jehoiachin was thirty-seven years a prisoner, in confinement, in contempt, ever since he was eighteen years old, in which time we may suppose him so inured to captivity that he had forgotten the sweets of liberty; or, rather, that after so long an imprisonment it would be doubly welcome to him. Let those whose afflictions have been lengthened out encourage themselves with this instance; the vision will at the end speak comfortably, and therefore wait for it. *Dum spiro spero—While there is life there is hope. Non si male nunc, et olim sic erit—Though now we suffer, we shall not always suffer*. 4. That God can make his people to find favour in the eyes of those that are their oppressors, and unaccountably turn their hearts to pity them, according to that word (Ps. cvi. 46), *He made them to be pitied of all those that carried them captives*. He can bring those that have spoken roughly to speak kindly, and those to

feed his people that have fed upon them. Those therefore that are under oppression will find that it is not in vain to hope and quietly to wait for the salvation of the Lord. Therefore our times are in God's hand, because the hearts of all we deal with are so. 5. And now, upon the whole matter, comparing the prophecy and the history of this book together, we may learn, in general, (1.) That it is no new thing for churches and persons highly dignified to degenerate, and become very corrupt. (2.) That iniquity tends to the ruin of those that harbour it; and, if it be not repented of and forsaken, will certainly end in their ruin. (3.) That external professions and privileges will not only not amount to an excuse for sin and an exemption from ruin, but will be a very great aggravation of both. (4.) That no word of God shall fall to the ground, but the event will fully answer the prediction; and the unbelief of man shall not make God's threatenings, any more than his promises, of no effect. The justice and truth of God are here written in bloody characters, for the conviction or the confusion of all those that make a jest of his threatenings. Let them *not be deceived, God is not mocked*.

AN

## EXPOSITION,

WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,

OF THE

## LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH.

SINCE what Solomon says, though contrary to the common opinion of the world, is certainly true, that *sorrow is better than laughter, and it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting*, we should come to the reading and consideration of the melancholy chapters of this book, not only willingly, but with an expectation to edify ourselves by them; and, that we may do this, we must compose ourselves to a holy sadness and resolve to weep with the weeping prophet. Let us consider, I. The title of this book; in the Hebrew it has none, but is called (as the books of Moses are) from the first word *Eekah—How*; but the Jewish commentators call it, as the Greeks do, and we from them, *Kinoth—Lamentations*. As we have sacred odes or songs of joy, so have we sacred elegies or songs of lamentation; such variety of methods has Infinite Wisdom taken to work upon us and move our affections, and so soften our hearts and make them susceptible of the impressions of divine truths, as the wax of the seal. We have not only piped unto you, but have mourned likewise, Matt. xi. 17. II. The penman of this book; it was Jeremiah the prophet, who is here Jeremiah the poet, and *vates* signifies both; therefore this book is fitly adjoined to the book of his prophecy, and is as an appendix to it. We had there at large the predictions of the desolations of Judah and Jerusalem, and then the history of them, to show how punctually the predictions were accomplished, for the confirming of our faith: now here we have the expressions of his sorrow upon occasion of them, to show that he was very sincere in

the protestations he had often made that he did not desire the woeful day, but that, on the contrary, the prospect of it filled him with bitterness. When he saw these calamities at a distance, he wished that his *head were waters and his eyes fountains of tears*; and, when they came, he made it to appear that he did not dissemble in that wish, and that he was far from being disaffected to his country, which was the crime his enemies charged him with. Though his country had been very unkind to him, and though the ruin of it was both a proof that he was a true prophet and a punishment of them for prosecuting him as a false prophet, which might have tempted him to rejoice in it, yet he sadly lamented it, and herein showed a better temper than that which Jonah was of with respect to Nineveh. III. The occasion of these Lamentations was the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem by the Chaldean army and the dissolution of the Jewish state both civil and ecclesiastical thereby. Some of the rabbies will have these to be the Lamentations which Jeremiah penned upon occasion of the death of Josiah, which are mentioned 2 Chron. xxxv. 25. But, though it is true that that opened the door to all the following calamities, yet these Lamentations seem to be penned in the sight, not in the foresight, of those calamities—when they had already come, not when they were at a distance; and there is nothing of Josiah in them, and his praise, as was, no question, in the lamentations for him. No, it is Jerusalem's funeral that this is an elegy upon. Others of them will have these Lamentations to be contained in the roll which Baruch wrote from Jeremiah's mouth, and which Jehoiakim burnt, and they suggest that at first there were in it only the 1st, 2d, and 4th chapters, but that the 3d and 5th were the *many like words* that were afterwards added; but this is a groundless fancy; that roll is expressly said to be a repetition and summary of the prophet's sermons, Jer. xxxvi. 2. IV. The composition of it; it is not only poetical, but alphabetical, all except the 5th chapter, as some of David's psalms are; each verse begins with a several letter in the order of the Hebrew alphabet, the first *aleph*, the second *beth*, &c., but the 3d chapter is a triple alphabet, the first three beginning with *aleph*, the next three with *beth*, &c., which was a help to memory (it being designed that these mournful ditties should be got by heart) and was an elegance in writing then valued and therefore not now to be despised. They observe that in the 2nd, 3d, and 4th chapters, the letter *pe* is put before *ain*, which in all the Hebrew alphabets follows it, for a reason of which Dr. Lightfoot offers this conjecture, That the letter *ajin*, which is the numeral letter for LXX., was thus, by being displaced, made remarkable, to put them in mind of the seventy years at the end of which God would turn again their captivity. V. The use of it: of great use, no doubt, it was to the pious Jews in their sufferings, furnishing them with spiritual language to express their natural grief by, helping to preserve the lively remembrance of Zion among them, and their children that never saw it, when they were in Babylon, directing their tears into the right channel (for they are here taught to mourn for sin and mourn to God), and withal encouraging their hopes that God would yet return and have mercy upon them; and it is of use to us, to affect us with godly sorrow for the calamities of the church of God, as becomes those that are living members of it and are resolved to take our lot with it.

## CHAP. I.

We have here the first alphabet of this lamentation, twenty-two stanzas, in which the miseries of Jerusalem are bitterly bewailed and her present deplorable condition is aggravated by comparing it with her former prosperous state; all along, sin is acknowledged and complained of as the procuring cause of all these miseries; and God is appealed to for justice against their enemies and applied to for compassion towards them. The chapter is all of a piece, and the several remonstrances are interwoven; but here is, I. A complaint made to God of their calamities, and his compassionate consideration desired, ver. 1—11. II. The same complaint made to their friends, and their compassionate consideration desired, ver. 12—17. III. An appeal to God and his righteousness concerning it (ver. 18—22), in which he is justified in their affliction and is humbly solicited to justify himself in their deliverance.

**H**OW doth the city sit solitary, *that was full of people!* *how* is she become as a widow! she *that was* great among the nations, *and* princess among the provinces, *how* is she become tributary! 2 She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears *are* on her cheeks: among all her lovers she hath none to comfort *her*: all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they are become her enemies. 3 Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction, and because of great servitude: she dwelleth among

the heathen, she findeth no rest: all her persecutors overtook her between the straits. 4 The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn feasts: all her gates are desolate: her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted, and she *is* in bitterness. 5 Her adversaries are the chief, her enemies prosper; for the LORD hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions: her children are gone into captivity before the enemy. 6 And from the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed: her princes are become like harts *that* find no pasture, and they are gone without strength before the pursuer. 7 Jerusalem remembered in the days of her affliction and of her miseries all her pleasant things that she had in the days of old, when her people fell into the hand of the enemy, and none did help her: the adversaries saw her,



and did mock at her sabbaths. 8 Jerusalem hath grievously sinned; therefore she is removed: all that honoured her despise her, because they have seen her nakedness: yea, she sigheth, and turneth backward. 9 Her filthiness *is* in her skirts; she remembereth not her last end; therefore she came down wonderfully: she had no comforter. O Lord, behold my affliction: for the enemy hath magnified *himself*. 10 The adversary hath spread out his hand upon all her pleasant things: for she hath seen *that* the heathen entered into her sanctuary, whom thou didst command *that* they should not enter into thy congregation. 11 All her people sigh, they seek bread; they have given their pleasant things for meat to relieve the soul: see, O Lord, and consider; for I am become vile.

Those that have any disposition to *weep with those that weep*, one would think, should scarcely be able to refrain from tears at the reading of these verses, so very pathetic are the lamentations here.

I. The miseries of Jerusalem are here complained of as very pressing and by many circumstances very much aggravated. Let us take a view of these miseries.

1. As to their civil state. (1.) A city that was populous is now depopulated, v. 1. It is spoken of by way of wonder—Who would have thought that ever it should come to this! Or by way of enquiry—What is it that has brought it to this? Or by way of lamentation—Alas! alas! (as Rev. xviii. 10, 16, 19) *how doth the city sit solitary that was full of people!* She was full of her own people that replenished her, and full of the people of other nations that resorted to her, with whom she had both profitable commerce and pleasant converse; but now her own people are carried into captivity, and strangers make no court to her: she *sits solitary*. The *chief places of the city* are not now, as they used to be, *places of concourse*, where wisdom cried (Prov. i. 20, 21); and justly are they left unfrequented, because wisdom's cry there was not heard. Note, Those that are ever so much increased God can soon diminish. *How has she become as a widow!* Her king that was, or should have been, as a husband to her, is cut off, and gone; her God has departed from her, and has given her a bill of divorce; she is emptied of her children, is solitary and sorrowful as a widow. Let no family, no state, not Jerusalem, no, nor Babylon herself, be secure, and say, *I sit as a queen*, and shall never *sit as a widow*, Isa. xlvii. 8; Rev. xviii. 7. (2.) A

city that had dominion is now in subjection. She had been *great among the nations*, greatly loved by some and greatly feared by others, and greatly observed and obeyed by both; some made her presents, and others paid her taxes; so that she was really *princess among the provinces*, and every sheaf bowed to hers; even the princes of the people entreated her favour. But now the tables are turned; she has not only lost her friends and *sits solitary*, but has lost her freedom too and *sits tributary*; she paid tribute to Egypt first and then to Babylon. Note, Sin brings a people not only into solitude, but into slavery. (3.) A city that used to be full of mirth has now become melancholy and upon all accounts full of grief. Jerusalem had been a joyous city, whither the tribes went up on purpose to rejoice before the Lord; she was *the joy of the whole earth*, but now *she weeps sorely*, her laughter is turned into mourning, her solemn feasts are all gone; she weeps *in the night*, as true mourners do who weep in secret, in silence and solitude; *in the night*, when others compose themselves to rest, her thoughts are most intent upon her troubles, and grief then plays the tyrant. What the prophet's head was for her, when she regarded it not, now her head is—as *waters*, and her eyes *fountains of tears*, so that she *weeps day and night* (Jer. ix. 1); *her tears are continually on her cheeks*. Though nothing dries away sooner than a tear, yet fresh griefs extort fresh tears, so that her cheeks are never free from them. Note, 'There is nothing more commonly seen *under the sun* than the *tears of the oppressed*, with whom the *clouds return after the rain*, Eccl. iv. 1. (4.) Those that were separated from the heathen now *dwell among the heathen*; those that were a peculiar people are now a mingled people (v. 3): *Judah has gone into captivity*, out of her own land into the land of her enemies, and there she abides, and is likely to abide, among those that are aliens to God and the covenants of promise, with whom *she finds no rest*, no satisfaction of mind, nor any settlement of abode, but is continually hurried from place to place at the will of the victorious imperious tyrants. And again (v. 5): "*Her children have gone into captivity before the enemy*; those that were to have been the seed of the next generation are carried off; so that the land that is now *desolate* is likely to be still desolate and lost for want of heirs." Those that dwell among their own people, and that a free people, and in their own land, would be more thankful for the mercies they thereby enjoy if they would but consider the miseries of those that are forced into strange countries. (5.) Those that used in their wars to conquer are now conquered and triumphed over: *All her persecutors overlook her between the straits* (v. 3); they gained all possible advantages against her, so that her people unavoidably *fell into the*

hand of the enemy, for there was no way to escape (v. 7); they were hemmed in on every side, and, which way soever they attempted to flee, they found themselves embarrassed. When they made the best of their way they could make nothing of it, but were overtaken and overcome; so that every where *her adversaries are the chief and her enemies prosper* (v. 5); which way soever their sword turns they get the better. Such straits do men bring themselves into by sin. If we allow that which is our greatest adversary and enemy to have dominion over us, and to be chief in us, justly will our other enemies be suffered to have dominion over us. (6.) Those that had been not only a distinguished but a dignified people, on whom God had put honour, and to whom all their neighbours had paid respect, are now brought into contempt (v. 8): *All that honoured her before despise her*; those that courted an alliance with her now value it not; those that caressed her when she was in pomp and prosperity slight her now that she is in distress, *because they have seen her nakedness*. By the prevalency of the enemies against her they perceive her weakness, and that she is not so strong a people as they thought she had been; and by the prevalency of God's judgments against her they perceive her wickedness, which now comes to light and is every where talked of. Now it appears how they have vilified themselves by their sins: *The enemies magnify themselves against them* (v. 9); they trample upon them, and insult over them, and in their eyes they have *become vile*, the tail of the nations, though once they were the head. Note, *Sin is the reproach of any people*. (7.) Those that lived in a fruitful land were ready to perish, and many of them did perish, for want of necessary food (v. 11): *All her people sigh in despondency and despair*; they are ready to faint away; their spirits fail, and therefore they sigh, *for they seek bread and seek it in vain*. They were brought at last to that extremity that there was *no bread for the people of the land* (Jer. lii. 6), and in their captivity they had much ado to get bread, *ch. v. 6. They have given their pleasant things, their jewels and pictures, and all the furniture of their closets and cabinets, which they used to please themselves with looking upon, they have sold these to buy bread for themselves and their families, have parted with them for meat to relieve the soul, or (as the margin is) to make the soul come again, when they were ready to faint away*. They desired no other cordial than meat. *All that a man has will he give for life, and for bread, which is the staff of life*. Let those that abound in pleasant things not be proud of them, nor fond of them; for the time may come when they may be glad to let them go for necessary things. And let those that have competent food to relieve their soul be content with it,

and thankful for it, though they have not pleasant things.

2. We have here an account of their miseries in their ecclesiastical state, the ruin of their sacred interest, which was much more to be lamented than that of their secular concerns. (1.) Their religious feasts were no more observed, no more frequented (v. 4): *The ways of Zion do mourn*; they look melancholy, overgrown with grass and weeds. It used to be a pleasant diversion to see people continually passing and repassing in the highway that led to the temple, but now you may stand there long enough, and see nobody stir; for *none come to the solemn feasts*; a full end is put to them by the destruction of that which was the city of our solemnities, Isa. xxxiii. 20. *The solemn feasts* had been neglected and profaned (Isa. i. 11, 12), and therefore justly is an end now put to them. But, when thus *the ways of Zion* are made to *mourn*, all the sons of Zion cannot but mourn with them. It is very grievous to good men to see religious assemblies broken up and scattered, and those restrained from them that would gladly attend them. And, as *the ways of Zion mourned, so the gates of Zion*, in which the faithful worshippers used to meet, are *desolate*; for there is none to meet in them. Time was when *the Lord loved the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob*, but now he has forsaken them, and is provoked to withdraw from them, and therefore it cannot but fare with them as it did with the temple when Christ quitted it. *Behold, your house is left unto you desolate*, Matt. xxiii. 38. (2.) Their religious persons were quite disabled from performing their wonted services, were quite dispirited: *Her priests sigh for the desolations of the temple*; their songs are turned into sighs; they sigh, for they have nothing to do, and therefore there is nothing to be had; they sigh, as the people (v. 11), *for want of bread*, because the offerings of the Lord, which were their livelihood, failed. It is time to sigh when the priests, the Lord's ministers, sigh. *Her virgins also, that used, with their music and dancing, to grace the solemnities of their feasts, are afflicted and in heaviness*. Notice is taken of their service in the day of Zion's prosperity (Ps. lxxviii. 25, *Among them were the damsels playing with timbrels*), and therefore notice is taken of the failing of it now. *Her virgins are afflicted, and therefore she is in bitterness*; that is, all the inhabitants of Zion are so, whose character it is that they are *sorrowful for the solemn assembly*, and that to them *the reproach of it is a burden*, Zeph. iii. 18. (3.) Their religious places were profaned (v. 10): *The heathen entered into her sanctuary*, into the temple itself, into which no Israelite was permitted to enter, though ever so reverently and devoutly, but the priests only. *The stranger that comes nigh, even to worship there, shall be put to death*. Thither



the heathen now crowd rudely in, not to worship, but to plunder. God had commanded that *the heathen should not* so much as *enter into the congregation*, nor be incorporated with the people of the Jews (Deut. xxiii. 3); yet now they *enter into the sanctuary* without control. Note, Nothing is more grievous to those who have a true concern for the glory of God, nor is more lamented, than the violation of God's laws, and the contempt they see put upon sacred things. What *the enemy did wickedly in the sanctuary* was complained of, Ps. lxxiv. 3, 4. (4.) Their religious utensils, and all the rich things with which the temple was adorned and beautified, and which were made use of in the worship of God, were made a prey to the enemy (v. 10): *The adversary has spread out his hand upon all her pleasant things*, has grasped them all, seized them all, for himself. What these pleasant things are we may learn from Isa. lxiv. 11, where, to the complaint of the burning of the temple, it is added, *All our pleasant things are laid waste*; the ark and the altar, and all the other tokens of God's presence with them, these were their pleasant things above any other things, and these were now broken to pieces and carried away. Thus from the daughter of Zion *all her beauty has departed*, v. 6. *The beauty of holiness* was the *beauty of the daughter of Zion*; when the temple, that holy and beautiful house, was destroyed, her beauty was gone; that was the breaking of the staff of beauty, the taking away of the pledges and seals of the covenant, Zech. xi. 10. (5.) Their religious days were made a jest of (v. 7): *The adversaries saw her, and did mock at her sabbaths*. They laughed at them for observing one day in seven as a day of rest from worldly business. Juvenal, a heathen poet, ridicules the Jews in his time for losing a seventh part of their time:—

—cui septima quæque fuit lux  
Ignava et vitæ partem non attigit ullam—  
They keep their sabbaths to their cost,  
For thus one day in sev'n is lost;

whereas sabbaths, if they be sanctified as they ought to be, will turn to a better account than all the days of the week besides. And whereas the Jews professed that they did it in obedience to their God, and to his honour, their adversaries asked them, "What do you get by it now? What profit have you in keeping the ordinances of your God, who now deserts you in your distress?" Note, It is a very great trouble to all that love God to hear his ordinances mocked at, and particularly his sabbaths. Zion calls them *her sabbaths*, for the sabbath was made for men; they are his institutions, but they are her privileges; and the contempt put upon sabbaths all the sons of Zion take to themselves and lay to heart accordingly; nor will they look upon sabbaths, or any other divine ordinances, as less honourable, nor value them less, for their being mocked

at. (6.) That which greatly aggravated all these grievances was that her state at present was just the reverse of what it had been formerly, v. 7. Now, *in the days of affliction and misery*, when every thing was black and dismal, *she remembers all her pleasant things that she had in the days of old*, and now knows how to value them better than formerly, when she had the full enjoyment of them. God often makes us know the worth of mercies by the want of them; and adversity is borne with the greatest difficulty by those that have fallen into it from the height of prosperity. This cut David to the heart, when he was banished from God's ordinances, that he could remember when he *went with the multitude to the house of God*, Ps. xlii. 4.

11. The sins of Jerusalem are here complained of as the procuring provoking cause of all these calamities. Whoever are the instruments, God is the author of all these troubles; it is *the Lord that has afflicted her* (v. 5) and he has done it as a righteous Judge, for *she has sinned*. 1. Her sins are for number numberless. Are her troubles many? Her sins are many more. It is *for the multitude of her transgressions that the Lord has afflicted her*. See Jer. xxx. 14. When the transgressions of a people are multiplied we cannot say, as Job does in his own case, that *wounds are multiplied without cause*, Job ix. 17. 2. They are for nature exceedingly heinous (v. 8): *Jerusalem has grievously sinned*, has *sinned sin* (so the word is), sinned wilfully, deliberately, has sinned that sin which of all others is the abominable thing that the Lord hates, the sin of idolatry. The sins of Jerusalem, that makes such a profession and enjoys such privileges, are of all others the most grievous sins. She has *sinned grievously* (v. 8), and therefore (v. 9) *she came down wonderfully*. Note, Grievous sins bring wondrous ruin; there are some workers of iniquity to whom there is a strange punishment, Job xxxi. 3. They are such sins as may plainly be read in the punishment. (1.) They have been very oppressive and therefore are justly oppressed (v. 3): *Judah has gone into captivity*, and it is *because of affliction and great servitude*, because the rich among them afflicted the poor and made them serve with rigour, and particularly (as the Chaldee paraphrases it) because they had oppressed their Hebrew servants, which is charged upon them, Jer. xxxiv. 11. Oppression was one of their crying sins (Jer. vi. 6, 7) and it is a sin that cries aloud. (2.) They have made themselves vile, and therefore are justly vilified. They *all despise her* (v. 8), for *her filthiness is in her skirts*; it appears upon her garments that she has rolled them in the mire of sin. None could stain our glory if we did not stain it ourselves. (3.) They have been very secure and therefore are justly surprised with this ruin (v. 9): *She remembers not her last end*; she did not take

the warning that was given her to *consider her latter end*, to consider what would be the end of such wicked courses as she took, and therefore she *came down wonderfully*, in an astonishing manner, that she might be made to feel what she would not fear; therefore God shall *make their plagues wonderful*.

III. Jerusalem's friends are here complained of as false and faint-hearted, and very unkind: They *have all dealt treacherously with her* (v. 2), so that, in effect, *they have become her enemies*. Her deceivers have created her as much vexation as her destroyers. The staff that breaks under us may do us as great a mischief as the *staff that beats us*, Ezek. xxix. 6, 7. Her *princes*, that should have protected her, have not courage enough to make head against the enemy for their own preservation; they *are like harts*, that, upon the first alarm, betake themselves to flight and make no resistance; nay, they *are like harts* that are famished for want of *pasture*, and therefore *are gone without strength before the pursuer*, and, having no strength for flight, are soon run down and made a prey of. Her neighbours are unneighbourly, for, 1. There is none to *help her* (v. 7); either they could not or they would not; nay, 2. *She has no comforter*, none to sympathize with her, or suggest any thing to alleviate her griefs, v. 7, 9. Like Job's friends, they saw it was to no purpose, her *grief was so great*; and *miserable comforters were they all* in such a case.

IV. Jerusalem's God is here complained to concerning all these things, and all is referred to his compassionate consideration (v. 9): "*O Lord! behold my affliction*, and take cognizance of it;" and (v. 11), "*See, O Lord! and consider*, take order about it." Note, The only way to make ourselves easy under our burdens is to cast them upon God first, and leave it to him to do with us as seemeth him good.

12 *Is it* nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted *me* in the day of his fierce anger. 13 From above hath he sent fire into my bones, and it prevaileth against them: he hath spread a net for my feet, he hath turned me back: he hath made me desolate and faint all the day. 14 The yoke of my transgressions is bound by his hand: they are wreathed, and come up upon my neck: he hath made my strength to fall, the LORD hath delivered me into *their* hands, from whom I am not able to rise up. 15 The LORD hath trodden under foot all my mighty men in the midst of me:

he hath called an assembly against me to crush my young men: the LORD hath trodden the virgin, the daughter of Judah, *as* in a wine-press. 16 For these *things* I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water, because the comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me: my children are desolate, because the enemy prevailed. 17 Zion spreadeth forth her hands, and *there is* none to comfort her: the LORD hath commanded concerning Jacob, *that* his adversaries *should* be round about him: Jerusalem is as a menstruous woman among them. 18 The LORD is righteous; for I have rebelled against his commandment: hear, I pray you, all people, and behold my sorrow: my virgins and my young men are gone into captivity. 19 I called for my lovers, *but* they deceived me: my priests and mine elders gave up the ghost in the city, while they sought their meat to relieve their souls. 20 Behold, O LORD; for I *am* in distress: my bowels are troubled; mine heart is turned within me; for I have grievously rebelled: abroad the sword bereaveth, at home *there is* as death. 21 They have heard that I sigh: *there is* none to comfort me: all mine enemies have heard of my trouble; they are glad that thou hast done *it*: thou wilt bring the day *that* thou hast called, and they shall be like unto me. 22 Let all their wickedness come before thee; and do unto them, as thou hast done unto me for all my transgressions: for my sighs *are* many, and my heart *is* faint.

The complaints here are, for substance, the same with those in the foregoing part of the chapter; but in these verses the prophet, in the name of the lamenting church, does more particularly acknowledge the hand of God in these calamities, and the righteousness of his hand.

I. The church in distress here magnifies her affliction, and yet no more than there was cause for; her groaning was not heavier than her strokes. She appeals to all spectators: *See if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow*, v. 12. This might perhaps be truly said of Jerusalem's griefs; but we are apt to apply it too sensibly to ourselves when we are in trouble and more than there is cause for. Because we feel most from our



own burden, and cannot be persuaded to reconcile ourselves to it, we are ready to cry out, Surely never was *sorrow like unto our sorrow*; whereas, if our troubles were to be thrown into a common stock with those of others, and then an equal dividend made, share and share alike, rather than stand to that we should each of us say, "Pray, give me my own again."

II. She here looks beyond the instruments to the author of her troubles, and owns them all to be directed, determined, and disposed of by him: "It is *the Lord* that has afflicted me, and he has afflicted me because he is angry with me; the greatness of his displeasure may be measured by the greatness of my distress; it is *in the day of his fierce anger*," v. 12. Afflictions cannot but be very much our griefs when we see them arising from God's wrath; so the church does here. 1. She is as one in a fever, and the fever is of God's sending: "*He has sent fire into my bones* (v. 13), a preternatural heat, which *prevails against them*, so that they are *burnt like a hearth* (Ps. cii. 3), pained and wasted, and dried away." 2. She is as one in a net, which the more he struggles to get out of the more he is entangled in, and this net is of God's spreading. "The enemies could not have succeeded in their stratagems had not God *spread a net for my feet*." 3. She is as one in a wilderness, whose way is embarrassed, solitary, and tiresome: "*He has turned me back*, that I cannot go on, *has made me desolate*, that I have nothing to support me with, but am *faint all the day*." 4. She is as one in a yoke, not yoked for service, but for penance, tied neck and heels together (v. 14): "*The yoke of my transgressions is bound by his hand*. Observe, We never are entangled in any yoke but what is framed out of our own transgressions. The sinner is *helden with the cords of his own sins*, Prov. v. 22. The yoke of Christ's commands is an *easy yoke* (Matt. xi. 30), but that of our own transgressions is a heavy one. God is said to bind this yoke when he charges guilt upon us, and brings us into those inward and outward troubles which our sins have deserved; when conscience, as his deputy, binds us over to his judgment, then *the yoke is bound and wreathed by the hand of his justice*, and nothing but the hand of his pardoning mercy will unbind it. 5. She is as one in the dirt, and he it is that has *trodden under foot all her mighty men*, that has disabled them to stand, and overthrown them by one judgment after another, and so left them to be trampled upon by their proud conquerors, v. 15. Nay, she is as one in a wine-press, not only trodden down, but trodden to pieces, crushed as grapes in the wine-press of God's wrath, and her blood pressed out as wine, and it is God that has thus *trodden the virgin, the daughter of Judah*. 6. She is in the hand of her enemies, and it is the Lord

that has delivered her into their hands (v. 14): "*He has made my strength to fall*, so that I am not able to make head against them; nay, not only not able to rise up against them, but not able to rise up from them, and then *he has delivered me into their hands*; nay (v. 15), *he has called an assembly against me, to crush my young men*, and such an assembly as it is in vain to think of opposing; and again (v. 17), *The Lord has commanded concerning Jacob that his adversaries should be round about him*. He that has many a time commanded deliverances for Jacob (Ps. xlv. 4) now commands an invasion against Jacob, because Jacob has disobeyed the commands of his law.

III. She justly demands a share in the pity and compassion of those that were the spectators of her misery (v. 12): "*Is it nothing to you, all you that pass by?* Can you look upon me without concern? What! are your hearts as adamants and your eyes as marbles, that you cannot bestow upon me one compassionate thought, or look, or tear? Are not you also in the body? Is it nothing to you that your neighbour's house is on fire?" There are those to whom Zion's sorrows and ruins are nothing; they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. How pathetically does she beg their compassion! (v. 18): "*Hear, I pray you, all people, and behold my sorrow: hear my complaints, and see what cause I have for them*." This is a request like that of Job (ch. xix. 21), *Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O you my friends!* It helps to make a burden sit lighter if our friends sympathize with us, and mingle their tears with ours, for this is an evidence that, though we are in affliction, we are not in contempt, which is commonly as much dreaded in an affliction as any thing.

IV. She justifies her own grief, though it was very extreme, for these calamities (v. 16): "*For these things I weep, I weep in the night* (v. 2), when none sees; *my eye, my eye, runs down with water*." Note, This world is a vale of tears to the people of God. Zion's sons are often Zion's mourners. *Zion spreads forth her hands* (v. 17), which is here an expression rather of despair than of desire; she flings out her hands as giving up all for gone. Let us see how she accounts for this passionate grief. 1. Her God has withdrawn from her; and Micah, that had but gods of gold, when they were stolen from him cried out, *What have I more? And what is it that you say unto me? What aileth thee?* The church here grieves excessively; for, says she, *the comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me*. God is the comforter; he used to be so to her; he only can administer effectual comforts; it is his word that speaks them; it is his Spirit that speaks them to us. His are strong consolations, able to *relieve the soul, to bring it back* when it is gone, and we

cannot of ourselves *fetch it again*; but now he has departed in displeasure, he is *far from me*, and beholds me *afar off*. Note, It is no marvel that the souls of the saints faint away, when God, who is the only Comforter that can relieve them, keeps at a distance. 2. Her children are removed from her, and are in no capacity to help her: it is for them that she weeps, as Rachel for hers, *because they were not*, and therefore she *refuses to be comforted*. Her children were desolate, *because the enemy prevailed* against them; there is *none of all her sons to take her by the hand* (Isa. li. 18); they cannot help themselves, and how should they help her? Both the damsels and the youths, that were her joy and hope, *have gone into captivity*, v. 18. It is said of the Chaldeans that they had *no compassion upon young men nor maidens*, not on the fair sex, not on the blooming age, 2 Chron. xxxvi. 17. 3. Her friends failed her; some would not and others could not give her any relief. She *spread forth her hands*, as begging relief, but *there is none to comfort her* (v. 17), none that can do it, none that cares to do it; she *called for her lovers*, and, to engage them to help her, *called them her lovers*, but they *deceived her* (v. 19), they proved like the brooks in summer to the thirsty traveller, Job vi. 15. Note, Those creatures that we set our hearts upon and raise our expectations from we are commonly deceived and disappointed in. Her idols were her lovers. Egypt and Assyria were her confidants. But they deceived her. Those that made court to her in her prosperity were shy of her, and strange to her, in her adversity. Happy are those that have made God their friend and keep themselves in his love, for he will not deceive them! 4. Those whose office it was to guide her were disabled from doing her any service. The *priests and the elders*, that should have appeared at the head of affairs, died for hunger (v. 19); they *gave up the ghost*, or were ready to expire, *while they sought their meat*; they went a begging for bread to keep them alive. The *famine is sore indeed in the land* when there is no bread to the wise, when priests and elders are starved. The priests and elders should have been her comforters; but how should they comfort others when they themselves were comfortless? "*They have heard that I sigh*, which should have summoned them to my assistance; but *there is none to comfort me*. *Lover and friend hast thou put far from me*." 5. Her enemies were too hard for her, and they insulted over her; they *have prevailed*, v. 16. *Abroad the sword bereaves* and slays all that comes in its way, and *at home* all provisions are cut off by the besiegers, so that *there is as death*, that is, famine, which is as bad as the pestilence, or worse—the *sword without and terror within*, Deut. xxxii. 25. And as the enemies, that were the instruments of the calamity, were

very barbarous, so were those that were the standers by, the Edomites and Ammonites, that bore ill will to Israel: They have *heard of my trouble*, and are *glad that thou hast done it* (v. 21); they rejoice in the trouble itself; they rejoice that it is God's doing; it pleases them to find that God and his Israel have fallen out, and they act accordingly with a great deal of strangeness towards them. *Jerusalem is as a menstruous woman among them*, that they are afraid of touching and are shy of, v. 17. Upon all these accounts it cannot be wondered at, nor can she be blamed, that *her sighs are many*, in grieving for what is, and that *her heart is faint* (v. 22) in fear of what is yet further likely to be.

V. She justifies God in all that is brought upon her, acknowledging that her sins had deserved these severe chastenings. The yoke that lies so heavily, and binds so hard, is *the yoke of her transgressions*, v. 14. The fetters we are held in are of our own making, and it is with our own rod that we are beaten. When the church had spoken here as if she thought the Lord severe she does well to correct herself, at least to explain herself, by acknowledging (v. 18), *The Lord is righteous*. He does us no wrong in dealing thus with us, nor can we charge him with any injustice in it; how unrighteous soever men are, we are sure that the *Lord is righteous*, and manifests his justice, though they contradict all the laws of theirs. Note, Whatever our troubles are, which God is pleased to inflict upon us, we must own that therein he *is righteous*; we understand neither him nor ourselves if we do not own it, 2 Chron. xii. 6. She owns the equity of God's actions, by owning the iniquity of her own: *I have rebelled against his commandments* (v. 18); and again (v. 20), *I have grievously rebelled*. We cannot speak ill enough of sin, and we must always speak worst of our own sin, must call it *rebellion, grievous rebellion*; and very grievous sin is to all true penitents. It is this that lies more heavily upon her than the afflictions she was under: "*My bowels are troubled*; they work within me as the troubled sea; *my heart is turned within me*, is restless, is turned upside down; *for I have grievously rebelled*." Note, Sorrow for sin must be great sorrow and must affect the soul.

VI. She appeals both to the mercy and to the justice of God in her present case. 1. She appeals to the mercy of God concerning her own sorrows, which had made her the proper object of his compassion (v. 20): "*Behold, O Lord! for I am in distress*; take cognizance of my case, and take such order for my relief as thou pleasest." Note, It is matter of comfort to us that the troubles which oppress our spirits are open before God's eye. 2. She appeals to the justice of God concerning the injuries that her enemies did her (v. 21, 22): *Thou wilt bring the day*



that thou hast called, the day that is fixed in the counsels of God and published in the prophecies, when my enemies, that now prosecute me, *shall be like unto me*, when the cup of trembling, now put into my hands, shall be put into theirs." It may be read as a prayer, "Let the day appointed come," and so it goes on, "*Let their wickedness come before thee*, let it come to be remembered, let it come to be reckoned for; take vengeance on them for all the wrongs they have done to me (Ps. cix. 14, 15); hasten the time when thou wilt *do to them* for their transgressions *as thou hast done to me* for mine." This prayer amounts to a protestation against all thoughts of a coalition with them, and to a prediction of their ruin, subscribing to that which God had in his word spoken of it. Note, Our prayers may and must agree with God's word; and what day God has here called we are to call for, and no other. And though we are bound in charity to forgive our enemies, and to pray for them, yet we may in faith pray for the accomplishment of that which God has spoken against his and his church's enemies, that will not repent to give him glory.

## CHAP. II.

The second alphabetical elegy is set to the same mournful tune with the former, and the substance of it is much the same; it begins with Eccl., as that did, "How sad is our case! Alas for us!" I. Here is the anger of Zion's God taken notice of as the cause of her calamities, ver. 1-9. II. Here is the sorrow of Zion's children taken notice of as the effect of her calamities, ver. 10-19. III. The complaint is made to God, and the matter referred to his compassionate consideration, ver. 20-22. The hand that wounded must make whole.

**H**OW hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger, and cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel, and remembered not his footstool in the day of his anger! 2 The Lord hath swallowed up all the habitations of Jacob, and hath not pitied: he hath thrown down in his wrath the strong holds of the daughter of Judah; he hath brought *them* down to the ground: he hath polluted the kingdom and the princes thereof. 3 He hath cut off in *his* fierce anger all the horn of Israel: he hath drawn back his right hand from before the enemy, and he burned against Jacob like a flaming fire, *which* devoureth round about. 4 He hath bent his bow like an enemy: he stood with his right hand as an adversary, and slew all *that were* pleasant to the eye in the tabernacle of the daughter of Zion: he poured out his fury like fire. 5 The Lord was as an enemy: he hath swallowed up Israel, he hath

swallowed up all her palaces: he hath destroyed his strong holds, and hath increased in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation. 6 And he hath violently taken away his tabernacle, *as if it were* of a garden: he hath destroyed his places of the assembly: the Lord hath caused the solemn feasts and sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion, and hath despised in the indignation of his anger the king and the priest. 7 The Lord hath cast off his altar, he hath abhorred his sanctuary, he hath given up into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces; they have made a noise in the house of the Lord, as in the day of a solemn feast. 8 The Lord hath purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion: he hath stretched out a line, he hath not withdrawn his hand from destroying: therefore he made the rampart and the wall to lament; they languished together. 9 Her gates are sunk into the ground; he hath destroyed and broken her bars. her king and her princes *are* among the Gentiles: the law *is* no more; her prophets also find no vision from the Lord.

It is a very sad representation which is here made of the state of God's church, of Jacob and Israel, of Zion and Jerusalem; but the emphasis in these verses seems to be laid all along upon the hand of God in the calamities which they were groaning under. The grief is not so much that such and such things are done as that God has done them, that he appears angry with them; it is he that chastens them, and chastens them *in wrath* and in *his hot displeasure*; he has become their enemy, and fights against them; and this, this is the wormwood and the gall in the affliction and the misery.

I. Time was when God's delight was in his church, and he appeared to her, and appeared for her, as a friend. But now his displeasure is against her; he is angry with her, and appears and acts against her as an enemy. This is frequently repeated here, and sadly lamented. What he has done he has done *in his anger*; this makes the present day a melancholy day indeed with us, that it is *the day of his anger* (v. 1), and again (v. 2) it is *in his wrath*, and (v. 3) it is *in his fierce anger*, that he has *thrown down* and *cut off*, and (v. 6) in *the indignation of his anger*. Note, To those who know how to value God's favour nothing appears more dreadful than his anger; corrections in love

are easily borne, but rebukes in love wound deeply. It is God's wrath that *burns against Jacob like a flaming fire* (v. 3), and it is a consuming fire; it *devours round about*, devours all her honours, all her comforts. This is the  *fury that is poured out like fire* (v. 4), like the fire and brimstone which were rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah; but it was their sin that kindled this fire. God is such a tender Father to his children that we may be sure he is never angry with them but when they provoke him, and give him cause to be angry; nor is he ever angry more than there is cause for. God's covenant with them was that if they would *obey his voice* he would be an *enemy to their enemies* (Exod. xxiii. 22), and he had been so as long as they kept close to him; but now he is an enemy to them; at least he is *as an enemy*, v. 5. He has *bent his bow like an enemy*, v. 4. He stood *with his right hand stretched out against them*, and a sword drawn in it *as an adversary*. God is not really an enemy to his people, no, not when he is angry with them and corrects them in anger. We may be sorely displeased against our dearest friends and relations, whom yet we are far from having an enmity to. But sometimes he is *as an enemy* to them, when all his providences concerning them seem in outward appearance to have a tendency to their ruin, when every thing makes against them and nothing for them. But, blessed be God, Christ is *our peace*, our peacemaker, who has slain the enmity, and in him we may *agree with our adversary*, which it is our wisdom to do, since it is in vain to contend with him, and he offers us advantageous conditions of peace.

II. Time was when God's church appeared very bright, and illustrious, and considerable among the nations; but now *the Lord has covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud* (v. 1), a dark cloud, which is very terrible to herself, and through which she cannot see his face; *a thick cloud* (so the word signifies), a *black cloud*, which eclipses all her glory and conceals her excellency; not such a cloud as that under which God conducted them through the wilderness, or that in which God took possession of the temple and filled it with his glory: no, that side of the cloud is now turned towards them which was turned towards the Egyptians in the Red Sea. *The beauty of Israel is now cast down from heaven to the earth*; their princes (2 Sam. i. 19), their religious worship, their beauty of holiness, all that which recommended them to the affection and esteem of their neighbours and rendered them amiable, which had *lifted them up to heaven*, was now withered and gone, because God had covered it with a cloud. He has *cut off all the horn of Israel* (v. 3), all her beauty and majesty (Ps. cxxxii. 17), all her plenty and fulness, and all her power and authority. They had, in their pride,

lifted up their horn against God, and therefore justly will God *cut off their horn*. He disabled them to resist and oppose their enemies; he *turned back their right hand*, so that they were not able to follow the blow which they gave nor to ward off the blow which was given them. What can their right hand do against the enemy when God draws it back, and withers it, as he did Jeroboam's? Thus was the *beauty of Israel cast down*, when a people famed for courage were not able to stand their ground nor make good their post.

III. Time was when Jerusalem and the cities of Judah were strong and well fortified, were trusted to by the inhabitants and let alone by the enemy as impregnable. But now the Lord has in anger *swallowed them up*; they are quite gone; the forts and barriers are taken away, and the invaders meet with no opposition: the stately structures, which were their strength and beauty, are pulled down and laid waste. 1. The Lord has in anger *swallowed up all the habitations of Jacob* (v. 2), both the cities and the country houses; they are burnt, or otherwise destroyed, so totally ruined that they seem to have been *swallowed up*, and no remains left of them. He has *swallowed up, and has not pitied*. One would have thought it a pity that such sumptuous houses, so well built, so well furnished, should be quite destroyed, and that some pity should have been had for the poor inhabitants that were thus dislodged and driven to wander; but God's wonted compassions seemed to fail: *He has swallowed up Israel*, as a lion swallows up his prey, v. 5. 2. He has *swallowed up* not only her common habitations, but her palaces, *all her palaces*, the habitations of their princes and great men (v. 5), though those were most stately, and strong, and rich, and well guarded. God's judgments, when they come with commission, level palaces with cottages, and as easily swallow them up. If palaces be polluted with sin, as theirs were, let them expect to be visited with a curse, which shall *consume them, with the timber thereof and the stones thereof*, Zech. v. 4. 3. He has destroyed not only their dwelling-places, but their *strong-holds*, their castles, citadels, and places of defence. These he has *thrown down in his wrath*, and *brought them to the ground*; for shall they stand in the way of his judgments, and give check to the progress of them? No; let them drop like leaves in autumn; let them be rased to the foundations, and made to touch the ground, v. 2. And again (v. 5), *He has destroyed his strong-holds*; for what strength could they have against God? And thus has he *increased in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation*, for they could not but be in a dreadful consternation when they saw all their defence departed from them. This is again insisted on, v. 7—9. In order to the *swallowing up of her*



palaces, he has *given up into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces*, which were their security, and, when they are *broken down*, the palaces themselves are soon broken into. The walls of palaces cannot protect them, unless God himself be a wall of fire round about them. This God did in his anger, and yet he has done it deliberately. It is the result of a previous purpose, and is done by a wise and steady providence; for the Lord has *purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion*; he brought the Chaldean army in on purpose to do this execution. Note, Whatever desolations God makes in his church, they are all according to his counsels; he *performs the thing that is appointed for us*, even that which makes most against us. But, when it is done, he has *stretched out a line*, a measuring line, to do it exactly and by measure: hitherto the destruction shall go, and no further; no more shall be cut off than what is marked to be so. Or it is meant of the *line of confusion* (Isa. xxxiv. 11), a levelling line; for he will go on with his work; he *has not withdrawn his hand from destroying*, that right hand which he stretched out against his people as an adversary, v. 4. As far as the purpose went the performance shall go, and his hand shall accomplish his counsel to the utmost, and not be withdrawn. Therefore he made the *rampart and the wall*, which the people had rejoiced in and upon which perhaps they had *made merry*, to *lament*, and they *languished together*; the *walls and the ramparts*, or bulwarks, upon them, fell together, and were left to condole with one another on their fall. *Her gates are gone* in an instant, so that one would think they were sunk into the ground with their own weight, and he *has destroyed and broken her bars*, those bars of Jerusalem's gates which formerly he had strengthened, Ps. cxlvii. 13. Gates and bars will stand us in no stead when God has withdrawn his protection.

IV. Time was when their government flourished, their princes made a figure, their kingdom was great among the nations, and the balance of power was on their side; but now it is quite otherwise: *He has polluted the kingdom and the princes thereof*, v. 2. They had first polluted themselves with their idolatries, and then God dealt with them as with polluted things; he threw them to the dunghill, the fittest place for them. He has given up their glory, which was looked upon as sacred (that is a character we give to majesty), to be trampled upon and profaned; and no marvel that the king and the priest, whose characters were always deemed venerable and inviolable, are despised by every body, when God has, in the indignation of his anger, despised the king and the priest, v. 6. He has abandoned them; he looks upon them as no longer worthy of the honours conveyed to them by the covenants of royalty and priesthood, but as having

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forfeited both; and then Zedekiah the king was used despitefully, and Seraiah the chief priest put to death as a malefactor. The crown has fallen from their heads, for *her king and her princes are among the Gentiles*, prisoners among them, insulted over by them (v. 9), and treated not only as common persons, but as the basest, without any regard to their character. Note, It is just with God to debase those by his judgments who have by sin debased themselves.

V. Time was when the ordinances of God were administered among them in their power and purity, and they had those tokens of God's presence with them; but now those were taken from them, that part of the *beauty of Israel* was gone which was indeed their greatest beauty. 1. The ark was God's footstool, under the mercy-seat, between the cherubim; this was of all others the most sacred symbol of God's presence (it is called his *footstool*, 1 Chron. xxviii. 2; Ps. xcix. 5; cxxxii. 7); there the Shechinah rested, and with an eye to this Israel was often protected and saved; but now he *remembered not his footstool*. The ark itself was suffered, as it should seem, to fall into the hands of the Chaldeans. God, being angry, threw that away; for it shall be no longer his footstool; the earth shall be so, as it had been before the ark was, Isa. lxvi. 1. Of what little value are the tokens of his presence when his presence is gone! Nor was this the first time that God gave his ark into captivity, Ps. lxxviii. 61. God and his kingdom can stand without that footstool. 2. Those that ministered in holy things had been *pleasant to the eye in the tabernacle of the daughter of Zion* (v. 4); they had been *purer than snow, whiter than milk* (ch. iv. 7); none more pleasant in the eyes of all good people than those that did the service of the tabernacle. But now these are slain, and their *blood is mingled with their sacrifices*. Thus is the priest despised as well as the king. Note, When those that were pleasant to the eye in Zion's tabernacle are slain God must be acknowledged in it; he has done it, and the *burning which the Lord has kindled must be bewailed* by the whole house of Israel, as in the case of Nadab and Abihu, Lev. x. 6. 3. The temple was God's tabernacle (as the tabernacle, while that was in being, was called his *temple*, Ps. xxvii. 4) and this he *has violently taken away* (v. 6); he has plucked up the stakes of it and cut the cords; it shall be no more a tabernacle, much less his; he has *taken it away*, as the keeper of a garden takes away his hovel or shade, when he has done with it and has no more occasion for it; he takes it down as easily, as speedily, and with as little regret and reluctance as if it were but a *cottage in a vineyard* or a *lodge in a garden of cucumbers* (Isa. i. 8), but a *booth which the keeper makes*, Job xxvii. 18. When men profane God's tabernacle it is just with him to take it from

them. God had justly refused to *smell in their solemn assemblies* (Amos v. 21); they had provoked him to withdraw from them, and then no marvel that he has *destroyed his places of the assembly*; what should they do with the places when the services had become an abomination? He has now *abhorred his sanctuary* (v. 7); it has been defiled with sin, that only thing which he hates, and for the sake of that he abhors even his sanctuary, which he had delighted in and called *his rest for ever*, Ps. cxxxii. 14. Thus he had *done to Shiloh*. Now the enemies have made as great a *noise of revelling and blaspheming in the house of the Lord* as ever had been made with the temple-songs and music *in the day of a solemn feast*, Ps. lxxiv. 4. Some, by the *places of the assembly* (v. 6), understand not only the temple, but the synagogues, and the schools of the prophets, which the enemy had *burnt up*, Ps. lxxiv. 8. 4. The solemn feasts and the sabbaths had been carefully remembered, and the people constantly put in mind of them; but now the Lord has *caused those to be forgotten*, not only in the country, among those that lived at a distance, but even in Zion itself; for there were none left to remember them, nor were there the places left where they used to be observed. Now that Zion was in ruins no difference was made between sabbath time and other times; every day was a day of mourning, so that all the *solemn feasts were forgotten*. Note, It is just with God to deprive those of the benefit and comfort of sabbaths and solemn feasts who have not duly valued them, nor conscientiously observed them, but have profaned them, which was one of the sins that the Jews were often charged with. Those that have *seen the days of the Son of man*, and slighted them, may *desire to see one of those days* and not be permitted, Luke xvii. 22. 5. The altar that had sanctified their gifts is now cast off; for God will no more accept their gifts, nor be honoured by their sacrifices, v. 7. The altar was *the table of the Lord*, but God will no longer keep house among them; he will neither feast them nor feast with them. 6. They had been blest with prophets and teachers of the law; but now *the law is no more* (v. 9); it is no more read by the people, no more expounded by the scribes; the tables of the law are gone with the ark; the book of the law is taken from them, and the people are forbidden to have it. What should those do with Bibles who had made no better improvement of them when they had them? *Her prophets also find no vision from the Lord*; God *answers them no more by prophets and dreams*, which was the melancholy case of Saul, 1 Sam. xxviii. 15. They had persecuted God's prophets, and despised the visions they had from the Lord, and therefore it is just with God to say that they shall have no more prophets, no more visions. Let them go to the

prophets that had flattered and deceived them with visions of their own hearts, for they shall have none from God to comfort them, or tell them *how long*. Those that misuse God's prophets justly lose them.

10 The elders of the daughter of Zion sit upon the ground, and keep silence: they have cast up dust upon their heads; they have girded themselves with sackcloth: the virgins of Jerusalem hang down their heads to the ground. 11 Mine eyes do fail with tears, my bowels are troubled, my liver is poured upon the earth, for the destruction of the daughter of my people; because the children and the sucklings swoon in the streets of the city. 12 They say to their mothers, Where *is* corn and wine? when they swooned as the wounded in the streets of the city, when their soul was poured out into their mothers' bosom. 13 What thing shall I take to witness for thee? what thing shall I liken to thee, O daughter of Jerusalem? what shall I equal to thee, that I may comfort thee, O virgin daughter of Zion? for thy breach *is* great like the sea: who can heal thee? 14 Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee: and they have not discovered thine iniquity, to turn away thy captivity; but have seen for thee false burdens and causes of banishment. 15 All that pass by clap *their* hands at thee; they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, *saying, Is this the city that men call The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth?* 16 All thine enemies have opened their mouth against thee: they hiss and gnash the teeth: they say, We have swallowed *her* up: certainly this *is* the day that we looked for; we have found, we have seen *it*. 17 The Lord hath done *that* which he had devised; he hath fulfilled his word that he had commanded in the days of old: he hath thrown down, and hath not pitied: and he hath caused *thine* enemy to rejoice over thee, he hath set up the horn of thine adversaries. 18 Their heart cried unto the Lord, O wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears run down like a river day and night:



give thyself no rest; let not the apple of thine eye cease. 19 Arise, cry out in the night: in the beginning of the watches pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord: lift up thy hands toward him for the life of thy young children, that faint for hunger in the top of every street. 20 Behold, O LORD, and consider to whom thou hast done this. Shall the women eat their fruit, and children of a span long? shall the priest and the prophet be slain in the sanctuary of the LORD? 21 The young and the old lie on the ground in the streets: my virgins and my young men are fallen by the sword; thou hast slain them in the day of thine anger; thou hast killed, and not pitied. 22 Thou hast called as in a solemn day my terrors round about, so that in the day of the LORD's anger none escaped nor remained: those that I have swaddled and brought up hath mine enemy consumed.

Justly are these called *Lamentations*, and they are very pathetic ones, the expressions of grief in perfection, mourning and woe, and nothing else, like the contents of Ezekiel's roll, Ezek. ii. 10.

I. Copies of lamentations are here presented and they are painted to the life. 1. The judges and magistrates, who used to appear in robes of state, have laid them aside, or rather are stripped of them, and put on the habit of mourners (v. 10); the elders now sit no longer in the judgment-seats, the *thrones of the house of David*, but they *sit upon the ground*, having no seat to repose themselves in, or in token of great grief, as Job's friends *sat with him upon the ground*, Job ii. 13. They open not their mouth in the gate, as usual, to give their opinion, but they *keep silence*, overwhelmed with grief, and not knowing what to say. They have *cast dust upon their heads*, and *girded themselves with sackcloth*, as deep mourners used to do; they had lost their power and wealth, and that made them grieve thus. *Ploratur lachrymis amissa pecunia veris*—Genuine are the tears which we shed over lost property. 2. The young ladies, who used to dress themselves so richly, and *walk with stretched-forth necks* (Isa. iii. 16), now are humbled: *The virgins of Jerusalem hang down their heads to the ground*; those are made to know sorrow who seemed to bid defiance to it and were always disposed to be merry. 3. The prophet himself is a pattern to the mourners, v. 11. *His eyes do fail with tears*: he has wept till he can weep

no more, has almost wept his eyes out, wept himself blind. Nor are the inward impressions of grief short of the outward expressions. *His bowels are troubled*, as they were when he saw these calamities coming (Jer. iv. 19, 20), which, one would think, might have excused him now; but even he, to whom they were no surprise, felt them an insupportable grief, to such a degree that *his liver is poured out on the earth*: he felt himself a perfect colliquation; all his entrails were melted and dissolved, as Ps. xxii. 14. Jeremiah himself had better treatment than his neighbours, better than he had had before from his own countrymen, nay, their destruction was his deliverance, their captivity his enlargement; the same that made them prisoners made him a favourite; and yet his private interests are swallowed up in a concern for the public, and he bewails the *destruction of the daughter of his people* as sensibly as if he himself had been the greatest sufferer in that common calamity. Note, The judgments of God upon the land and nation are to be lamented by us, though we, for our parts, may escape pretty well.

II. Calls to lamentation are here given: *The heart of the people cried unto the Lord*, v. 18. Some fear it was a cry, not of true repentance, but of bitter complaint; their heart was as full of grief as it could hold, and they gave vent to it in doleful shrieks and outcries, in which they made use of God's name; yet we will charitably suppose that many of them did in sincerity cry unto God for mercy in their distress; and the prophet bids them go on to do so: "*O wall of the daughter of Zion!* either you that stand upon the wall, you *watchmen on the walls* (Isa. lxiii. 6), when you see the enemies encamped about the walls and making their approaches towards them, or because of the wall (that is the subject of the lamentation), because of the *breaking down of the wall* (which was not done till about a month after the city was taken), because of this further calamity, let the daughter of Zion lament still." This was a thing which Nehemiah lamented long after, Neh. i. 3, 4. "*Let tears run down like a river day and night*, weep without intermission, give thyself no rest from weeping, *let not the apple of thy eye cease*." This intimates, 1. That the calamities would be continuing, and the causes of grief would frequently recur, and fresh occasion would be given them every day and every night to bemoan themselves. 2. That they would be apt, by degrees, to grow insensible and stupid under the hand of God, and would need to be still called upon to afflict their souls yet more and more, till their proud and hard hearts were thoroughly humbled and softened.

III. Causes for lamentation are here assigned, and the calamities that are to be bewailed are very particularly and pathetically described.

1. Multitudes perish by famine, a very sore judgment, and piteous is the case of those that fall under it. God had corrected them by scarcity of provisions through want of rain some time before (Jer. xiv. 1), and they were not brought to repentance by that lower degree of this judgment, and therefore now by the straitness of the siege God brought it upon them in extremity; for, (1.) The children died for hunger in their mothers' arms: *The children and sucklings*, whose innocent and helpless state entitles them to relief as soon as any, *swoon in the streets* (v. 11) *as the wounded* (v. 12), there being no food to be had for them; those that are starved die as surely as those that are stabbed. They lie a great while crying to their poor mothers for corn to feed them and wine to refresh them, for they are such as had been bred up to the use of wine and wanted it now; but there is none for them, so that at length *their soul is poured into their mothers' bosom*, and there they breathe their last. This is mentioned again (v. 19): *They faint for hunger in the top of every street*. Yet this is not the worst, (2.) There were some little children that were slain by their mothers' hands and eaten, v. 20. Such was the scarcity of provision that the *women ate the fruit of their own bodies*, even their children when they were but of a *span long*, according to the threatening, Deut. xxviii. 53. The like was done in the siege of Samaria, 2 Kings vi. 29. Such extremities, nay, such barbarities, were they brought to by the famine. Let us, in our abundance, thank God that we have food convenient, not only for ourselves, but for our children.

2. Multitudes fall by the sword, which devours one as well as another, especially when it is in the hand of such cruel enemies as the Chaldeans were. (1.) They spared no character, no, not the most distinguished; even the *priest and the prophet*, who of all men, one would think, might expect protection from heaven and veneration on earth, *are slain*, not abroad in the field of battle, where they are out of their place, as Hophni and Phinehas, but in the *sanctuary of the Lord*, the place of their business and which they hoped would be a refuge to them. (2.) They spared no age, no, not those who, by reason of their tender or their decrepit age, were exempted from taking up the sword; for even they *perished by the sword*. "The young, who have not yet come to bear arms, and the old, who have had their *discharge*, *lie on the ground, slain in the streets*, till some kind hand is found that will bury them." (3.) They spared no sex: *My virgins and my young men have fallen by the sword*. In the most barbarous military executions that ever we read of the virgins were spared, and made part of the spoil (Num. xxxi. 18, Judges v. 30), but here the virgins were put to the sword, as well as the young men. (4.) This was the *Lord's*

*doing*: he suffered the sword of the Chaldeans to devour thus without distinction: *Thou hast slain them in the day of thy anger*, for it is God that *kills and makes alive*, and saves alive, as he pleases. But that which follows is very harsh: *Thou hast killed, and not pitied*; for his soul is *grieved for the misery of Israel*. The enemies that used them thus cruelly were such as he had both mustered and summoned (v. 22): "*Thou hast called in, as in a solemn day, my terrors round about*, that is, the Chaldeans, who are such a terror to me;" enemies crowded into Jerusalem now as thickly as ever worshippers used to do on a solemn festival, so that they were quite overpowered with numbers, and none escaped nor remained; Jerusalem was made a perfect slaughter-house. Mothers are cut to the heart to see those whom they have taken such care of, and pains with, and whom they have been so tender of, thus inhumanly used, suddenly cut off, though not soon reared: *Those that I have swaddled, and brought up, has my enemy consumed*, as if they were brought forth for the murderer, like lambs for the butcher, Hosea ix. 13. Zion, who was a mother to them all, lamented to see those who were brought up in her courts, and under the tuition of her oracles, thus made a prey.

3. Their false prophets cheated them, v. 14. This was a thing which Jeremiah had lamented long before, and had observed with a great concern (Jer. xiv. 13): *Ah! Lord God, the prophets say unto them, You shall not see the sword*; and here he inserts it among his lamentations: *Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee*; they pretended to discover for thee, and then to discover to thee, the mind and will of God, to see *the visions of the Almighty* and then to speak his words; but they were all vain and foolish things; their visions were all their own fancies, and, if they thought they had any, it was only the product of a crazed head or a heated imagination, as appeared by what they delivered, which was all idle and impertinent: nay, it is most likely that they themselves knew that the visions they pretended were counterfeit, and all a sham, and made use of only to colour that which they designedly imposed upon the people with, that they might make an interest in them for themselves. They are thy prophets, not God's prophets; he never sent them, nor were they pastors after his heart, but the people set them up, told them what they should say, so that they were *prophets after their hearts*. (1.) Prophets should tell people of their faults, should show them their sins, that they may bring them to repentance, and so prevent their ruin; but these prophets knew that would lose them the people's affections and contributions, and knew they could not reprove their hearers without reproaching



themselves at the same time, and therefore *they have not discovered thy iniquity*; they saw it not themselves, or, if they did, saw so little evil in it, or danger from it, that they would not tell them of it, though that might have been a means, by taking away their iniquity, to turn away their captivity. (2.) Prophets should warn people of the judgments of God coming upon them, but these *saw for them false burdens*; the messages they pretended to deliver to them from God they knew to be false, and falsely ascribed to God; so that, by soothing them up in carnal security, they caused that banishment which, by plain dealing, they might have prevented.

4. Their neighbours laughed at them (v. 15): *All that pass by thee clap their hands at thee*. Jerusalem had made a great figure, got a great name, and borne a great sway, among the nations; it was the envy and terror of all about; and, when that city was thus reduced; they all (as men are apt to do in such a case) triumphed in its fall; *they hissed, and wagged the head*, pleasing themselves to see how much it had fallen from its former pretensions. *Is this the city (said they) that men called the perfection of beauty?* Ps. l. 2. How is it now the perfection of deformity! Where is all its beauty now? *Is this the city which was called the joy of the whole earth* (Ps. lxxviii. 2), which rejoiced in the gifts of God's bounty and grace more than any other place, and which all the earth rejoiced in? Where is all its joy now and all its glorying? It is a great sin thus to make a jest of others' miseries, and adds very much affliction to the afflicted.

5. Their enemies triumphed over them, v. 16. Those that wished ill to Jerusalem and her peace now vent their spite and malice, which before they concealed; they now *open their mouths*, nay, they widen them; they *hiss and gnash their teeth* in scorn and indignation; they triumph in their own success against her, and the rich prey they have got in making themselves masters of Jerusalem: "*We have swallowed her up*; it is our doing, and it is our gain; it is all our own now. Jerusalem shall never be either courted or feared as she has been. *Certainly this is the day that we have long looked for; we have found it; we have seen it; aha! so would we have it.*" Note, The enemies of the church are apt to take its shocks for its ruins, and to triumph in them accordingly; but they will find themselves deceived; *for the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church*.

6. Their God, in all this, appeared against them (v. 17): *The Lord has done that which he had devised*. The destroyers of Jerusalem could have no power against her unless it were given them from above. They are but the sword in God's hand; it is he that has *thrown down, and has not pitied*. "In this controversy of his with us we have not had

the usual instances of his compassion towards us." *He has caused thy enemy to rejoice over thee* (see Job xxx. 11); *he has set up the horn of thy adversaries*, has given them power and matter for pride. This is indeed the highest aggravation of the trouble, that God has become their enemy, and yet it is the strongest argument for patience under it; we are bound to submit to what God does, for, (1.) It is the performance of his purpose: *The Lord has done that which he had devised*; it is done with counsel and deliberation, not rashly, or upon a sudden resolve; it is the evil that he has framed (Jer. xviii. 11), and we may be sure it is framed so as exactly to answer the intention. What God devises against his people is designed for them, and so it will be found in the issue. (2.) It is the accomplishment of his predictions; it is the fulfilling of the scripture; he has now *put in execution his word that he had commanded in the days of old*. When he gave them his law by Moses he told them what judgments he would certainly inflict upon them if they transgressed that law; and now that they had been guilty of the transgression of this law he had executed the sentence of it, according to Lev. xxvi. 16, &c., Deut. xxviii. 15. Note, In all the providences of God concerning his church it is good to take notice of the fulfilling of his word; for there is an exact agreement between the judgments of God's hand and the judgments of his mouth, and when they are compared they will mutually explain and illustrate each other.

IV. Comforts for the cure of these lamentations are here sought for and prescribed.

1. They are sought for and enquired after, v. 13. The prophet seeks to find out some suitable acceptable words to say to her in this case: *Wherewith shall I comfort thee, O virgin! daughter of Zion?* Note, We should endeavour to comfort those whose calamities we lament, and, when our passions have made the worst of them, our wisdom should correct them and labour to make the best of them; we should study to make our sympathies with our afflicted friends turn to their consolation. Now the two most common topics of comfort, in case of affliction, are here tried, but are laid by because they would not hold. We commonly endeavour to comfort our friends by telling them, (1.) That their case is not singular, nor without precedent; there are many whose trouble is greater, and lies heavier upon them, than theirs does; but Jerusalem's case will not admit this argument: "*What thing shall I liken to thee, or what shall I equal to thee, that I may comfort thee?*" What city, what country, is there, whose case is parallel to thine? What witness shall I produce to prove an example that will reach thy present calamitous state? Alas! there is none, no sorrow like thine, because there is none

whose honour was like thine. (2.) We tell them that their case is not desperate, but that it may easily be remedied; but neither will that be admitted here, upon a view of human probabilities; for *thy breach is great, like the sea*, like the breach which the sea sometimes makes upon the land, which cannot be repaired, but still grows wider and wider. Thou art wounded, and *who shall heal thee?* No wisdom nor power of man can repair the desolations of such a broken shattered state. It is to no purpose therefore to administer any of these common cordials; therefore,

2. The method of cure prescribed is to address themselves to God, and by a penitent prayer to commit their case to him, and to be instant and constant in such prayers (v. 19): "*Arise out of thy dust, out of thy despondency, cry out in the night, watch unto prayer; when others are asleep, be thou upon thy knees, importunate with God for mercy; in the beginning of the watches, of each of the four watches, of the night (let thy eyes prevent them, Ps. cxix. 148), then pour out thy heart like water before the Lord, be free and full in prayer, be sincere and serious in prayer, open thy mind, spread thy case before the Lord; lift up thy hands towards him in holy desire and expectation: beg for the life of thy young children.* These poor lambs, what have they done? 2 Sam. xxiv. 17. Take with you words, take with you these words (v. 20), *Behold, O Lord! and consider to whom thou hast done this, with whom thou hast dealt thus. Are they not thy own, the seed of Abraham thy friend and of Jacob thy chosen? Lord, take their case into thy compassionate consideration!*" Note, Prayer is a salve for every sore, even the sorest, a remedy for every malady, even the most grievous. And our business in prayer is not to prescribe, but to subscribe to the wisdom and will of God; to refer our case to him, and then to leave it with him. *Lord, behold and consider, and thy will be done.*

### CHAP. III.

The scope of this chapter is the same with that of the two foregoing chapters, but the composition is somewhat different; that was in long verse, this is in short, another kind of metre; that was in single alphabets, this is in a treble one. Here is, I. A complaint of God's displeasure and the fruits of it, ver. 1—20. II. Words of comfort to God's people when they are in trouble and distress, ver. 21—35. III. Duty prescribed in this afflicted state, ver. 37—41. IV. The complaint renewed, ver. 42—54. V. Encouragement taken to hope in God, and continue waiting for his salvation, with an appeal to his justice against the persecutors of the church, ver. 55—65. Some make all this to be spoken by the prophet himself when he was imprisoned and persecuted; but it seems rather to be spoken in the person of the church now in captivity and in a manner desolate, and in the desolations of which the prophet did in a particular manner interest himself. But the complaints here are somewhat more general than those in the foregoing chapter, being accommodated to the case as well of particular persons as of the public, and intended for the use of the closet rather than of the solemn assembly. Some think Jeremiah makes these complaints, not only as an intercessor for Israel, but as a type of Christ, who was thought by some to be Jeremiah the weeping prophet, because he was much in tears (Matt. xvi. 14) and to him many of the passages here may be applied.

**I** AM the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath. 2

He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light. 3 Surely against me is he turned; he turneth his hand against me all the day. 4 My flesh and my skin hath he made old; he hath broken my bones. 5 He hath builded against me, and compassed me with gall and travel. 6 He hath set me in dark places, as *they that be dead of old*. 7 He hath hedged me about, that I cannot get out: he hath made my chain heavy. 8 Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer. 9 He hath inclosed my ways with hewn stone, he hath made my paths crooked. 10 He was unto me as a bear lying in wait, and as a lion in secret places. 11 He hath turned aside my ways, and pulled me in pieces: he hath made me desolate. 12 He hath bent his bow, and set me as a mark for the arrow. 13 He hath caused the arrows of his quiver to enter into my reins. 14 I was a derision to all my people; and their song all the day. 15 He hath filled me with bitterness, he hath made me drunken with wormwood. 16 He hath also broken my teeth with gravel stones, he hath covered me with ashes. 17 And thou hast removed my soul far off from peace: I forgot prosperity. 18 And I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the LORD: 19 Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. 20 My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me.

The title of the 102d Psalm might very fitly be prefixed to this chapter—*The prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and pours out his complaint before the Lord*; for it is very feelingly and fluently that the complaint is here poured out. Let us observe the particulars of it. The prophet complains, 1. That God is angry. This gives both birth and bitterness to the affliction (v. 1): *I am the man, the remarkable man, that has seen affliction, and has felt it sensibly, by the rod of his wrath.* Note, God is sometimes angry with his own people; yet it is to be complained of, not as a sword to cut off, but only as a rod to correct; it is to them *the rod of his wrath*, a chastening which, though grievous for the present, will in the issue be advantageous. By this rod we must expect to see affliction, and, if we be



made to see more than ordinary affliction by that rod, we must not quarrel, for we are sure that the anger is just and the affliction mild and mixed with mercy. 2. That he is at a loss and altogether in the dark. Darkness is put for great trouble and perplexity, the want both of comfort and of direction; this was the case of the complainant (v. 2): "*He has led me by his providence, and an unaccountable chain of events, into darkness and not into light, the darkness I feared and not into the light I hoped for.*" And (v. 6), *He has set me in dark places, dark as the grave, like those that are dead of old, that are quite forgotten, nobody knows who or what they were.* Note, The Israel of God, though children of light, sometimes walk in darkness. 3. That God appears against him as an enemy, as a professed enemy. God had been for him, but now "*Surely against me is he turned* (v. 3), as far as I can discern; for *his hand is turned against me all the day. I am chastened every morning,*" Ps. lxxiii. 14. And, when God's hand is continually turned against us, we are tempted to think that his heart is turned against us too. God had said once (Hos. v. 14), *I will be as a lion to the house of Judah*, and now he has made his word good (v. 10): "*He was unto me as a bear lying in wait, surprising me with his judgments, and as a lion in secret places;* so that which way soever I went I was in continual fear of being set upon and could never think myself safe." Do men shoot at those they are enemies to? *He has bent his bow*, the bow that was ordained against the church's persecutors, that is bent against her sons, v. 12. *He has set me as a mark for his arrow*, which he aims at, and will be sure to hit, and then *the arrows of his quiver enter into my reins*, give me a mortal wound, an inward wound, v. 13. Note, God has many arrows in his quiver, and they fly swiftly and pierce deeply. 4. That he is as one sorely afflicted both in body and mind. The Jewish state may now be fitly compared to a man wrinkled with age, for which there is no remedy (v. 4): "*My flesh and my skin has he made old; they are wasted and withered, and I look like one that is ready to drop into the grave; nay, he has broken my bones, and so disabled me to help myself,* v. 15. *He has filled me with bitterness, a bitter sense of these calamities.*" God has access to the spirit, and can so embitter that as thereby to embitter all the enjoyments; as, when the stomach is foul, whatever is eaten sours in it: "*He has made me drunk with wormwood, so intoxicated me with the sense of my afflictions that I know not what to say or do.* *He has mingled gravel with my bread, so that my teeth are broken with it* (v. 16) and what I eat is neither pleasant nor nourishing. *He has covered me with ashes, as mourners used to be, or (as some read it) he has fed me with ashes. I have eaten ashes like bread,*" Ps. ciii. 9. 5. That

he is not able to discern any way of escape or deliverance (v. 5): "*He has built against me, as forts and batteries are built against a besieged city. Where there was a way open it is now quite made up: He has compassed me on every side with gall and travail; I vex, and fret, and tire myself, to find a way of escape, but can find none,* v. 7. *He has hedged me about, that I cannot get out.*" When Jerusalem was besieged it was said to be compassed in on every side, Luke xix. 43. "I am chained; and as some notorious malefactors are double-fettered, and loaded with irons, so he has made my chain heavy. *He has also* (v. 9) *enclosed my ways with heven stone, not only hedged up my way with thorns* (Hos. ii. 6), but stopped it up with a stone wall, which cannot be broken through, so that *my paths are made crooked; I traverse to and fro, to the right hand, to the left, to try to get forward, but am still turned back.*" It is just with God to make those who walk in the crooked paths of sin, crossing God's laws, walk in the crooked paths of affliction, crossing their designs and breaking their measures. So (v. 11), *He has turned aside my ways; he has blasted all my counsels, ruined my projects, so that I am necessitated to yield to my own ruin.* He has pulled me in pieces; he has torn and is gone away (Hos. v. 14), and has made me desolate, has deprived me of all society and all comfort in my own soul." 6. That God turns a deaf ear to his prayers (v. 8): "*When I cry and shout, as one in earnest, as one that would make him hear, yet he shuts out my prayer and will not suffer it to have access to him.*" God's ear is wont to be open to the prayers of his people, and his door of mercy to those that knock at it; but now both are shut, even to one that cries and shouts. Thus sometimes God seems to be angry even against the prayers of his people (Ps. lxxx. 4), and their case is deplorable indeed when they are denied not only the benefit of an answer, but the comfort of acceptance. 7. That his neighbors make a laughing matter of his troubles (v. 14): "*I was a derision to all my people, to all the wicked among them, who made themselves and one another merry with the public judgments, and particularly the prophet Jeremiah's griefs. I am their song, their supernoth, or hand-instrument of music, their tabret* (Job xvii. 6), *that they play upon, as Nero on his harp when Rome was on fire.*" 8. That he was ready to despair of relief and deliverance: "*Then hast not only taken peace from me, but hast removed my goal far off from peace* (v. 17), so that it is not only not within reach, but not within view. *I forget prosperity; it is so long since I had it, and so unlikely that I should ever recover it, that I have lost the idea of it. I have been so inured to sorrow and adversity that I know not what joy and liberty mean. I have even given up all for gone, and am now,*

*My strength and my hope have perished from the Lord* (v. 18); I can no longer stay myself upon God as my support, for I do not find that he gives me encouragement to do so; nor can I look for his appearing in my behalf, so as to put an end to my troubles, for the case seems remediless, and even my God inexorable." Without doubt it was his infirmity to say this (Ps. lxxvii. 10), for with God there is *everlasting strength*, and he is his people's never-failing hope, whatever they may think. 9. That grief returned upon every remembrance of his troubles, and his reflections were as melancholy as his prospects, v. 19, 20. Did he endeavour, as Job did (Job ix. 27), to *forget his complaint*? Alas! it was to no purpose; he remembers, upon all occasions, *the affliction and the misery, the wormwood and the gall*. Thus emphatically does he speak of his affliction, for thus did he think of it, thus heavily did it lie when he reviewed it! It was an affliction that was misery itself. *My affliction and my transgression* (so some read it), my trouble and my sin that brought it upon me; this was *the wormwood and the gall in the affliction and the misery*. It is sin that makes the cup of affliction a bitter cup. *My soul has them still in remembrance*. The captives in Babylon had all the miseries of the siege in their mind continually and the flames and ruins of Jerusalem still before their eyes, and *wept when they remembered Zion*; nay, they could *never forget Jerusalem*, Ps. cxxxvii. 1, 5. *My soul, having them in remembrance, is humbled in me*, not only oppressed with a sense of the trouble, but in bitterness for sin. Note, It becomes us to have humble hearts under humbling providences, and to renew our penitent humiliations for sin upon every remembrance of our afflictions and miseries. Thus we may get good by former corrections and prevent further.

21 This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. 22 *It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed*, because his compassions fail not. 23 *They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness*. 24 The LORD *is* my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. 25 The LORD *is* good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. 26 *It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD*. 27 *It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth*. 28 He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne *it* upon him. 29 He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there

may be hope. 30 He giveth *his* cheek to him that smiteth him: he is filled full with reproach. 31 For the LORD will not cast off for ever: 32 But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. 33 For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men. 34 To crush under his feet all the prisoners of the earth, 35 To turn aside the right of a man before the face of the most High, 36 To subvert a man in his cause, the LORD approveth not.

Here the clouds begin to disperse and the sky to clear up; the complaint was very melancholy in the former part of the chapter, and yet here the tune is altered and the mourners in Zion begin to look a little pleasant. But for hope, the heart would break. To save the heart from being quite broken, here is something *called to mind*, which gives ground for *hope* (v. 21), which refers to what comes after, not to what goes before. *I make to return to my heart* (so the margin words it); what we have had in our hearts, and have laid to our hearts, is sometimes as if it were quite lost and forgotten, till God by his grace make it return to our hearts, that it may be ready to us when we have occasion to use it. "*I recal it to mind; therefore have I hope*, and am kept from downright despair." Let us see what these things are which he calls to mind.

I. That, bad as things are, it is owing to the mercy of God that they are not worse. We are *afflicted by the rod of his wrath*, but *it is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed*, v. 22. When we are in distress we should, for the encouragement of our faith and hope, observe what makes for us as well as what makes against us. Things are bad but they might have been worse, and therefore there is hope that they may be better. Observe here, 1. The streams of mercy acknowledged: *We are not consumed*. Note, The church of God is like Moses's bush, burning, yet *not consumed*; whatever hardships it has met with, or may meet with, it shall have a being in the world to the end of time. It is *persecuted* of men, but *not forsaken* of God, and therefore, though it is *cast down*, it is *not destroyed* (2 Cor. iv. 9), corrected, yet *not consumed*, refined in the furnace as silver, but *not consumed* as dross. 2. These streams followed up to the fountain: *It is of the Lord's mercies*. Here are mercies in the plural number, denoting the abundance and variety of those mercies. God is an inexhaustible *fountain of mercy, the Father of mercies*. Note, We all owe it to the sparing mercy of God *that we are not consumed*. Others have been consumed round about us, and we ourselves have been



in the consuming, and yet we are not consumed; we are out of the grave; we are out of hell. Had we been dealt with according to our sins, we should have been consumed long ago; but we have been dealt with according to God's mercies, and we are bound to acknowledge it to his praise.

II. That even in the depth of their affliction they still have experience of the tenderness of the divine pity and the truth of the divine promise. They had several times complained that God had not pitied (*ch. ii. 17, 21*), but here they correct themselves, and own, 1. That *God's compassions fail not*; they do not really fail, no, not even when in anger he seems to have shut up his tender mercies. These rivers of mercy run fully and constantly, but never run dry. No; they are new every morning; every morning we have fresh instances of God's compassion towards us; he visits us with them every morning (*Job vii. 18*); every morning does he bring his judgment to light, *Zeph. iii. 5*. When our comforts fail, yet God's compassions do not. 2. That *great is his faithfulness*. Though the covenant seemed to be broken, they owned that it still continued in full force; and, though Jerusalem be in ruins, the truth of the Lord endures for ever. Note, Whatever hard things we suffer, we must never entertain any hard thoughts of God, but must still be ready to own that he is both kind and faithful.

III. That God is, and ever will be, the all-sufficient happiness of his people, and they have chosen him and depend upon him to be such (*v. 24*): *The Lord is my portion, saith my soul*; that is, 1. "When I have lost all I have in the world, liberty, and livelihood, and almost life itself, yet I have not lost my interest in God." Portions on earth are perishing things, but God is a portion for ever. 2. "While I have an interest in God, therein I have enough; I have that which is sufficient to counterbalance all my troubles and make up all my losses." Whatever we are robbed of our portion is safe. 3. "This is that which I depend upon and rest satisfied with: Therefore will I hope in him. I will stay myself upon him, and encourage myself in him, when all other supports and encouragements fail me." Note, It is our duty to make God the portion of our souls, and then to make use of him as our portion and to take the comfort of it in the midst of our lamentations.

IV. That those who deal with God will find it is not in vain to trust in him; for, 1. He is good to those who do so, *v. 25*. He is good to all; his tender mercies are over all his works; all his creatures taste of his goodness. But he is in a particular manner good to those that wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. Note, While trouble is prolonged, and deliverance is deferred, we must patiently wait for God and his gracious returns to us. While we wait for him by faith,

we must seek him by prayer: our souls must seek him, else we do not seek so as to find. Our seeking will help to keep up our waiting. And to those who thus wait and seek God will be gracious; he will show them his marvellous lovingkindness. 2. Those that do so will find it good for them (*v. 26*): *It is good* (it is our duty, and will be our unspeakable comfort and satisfaction) *to hope and quietly to wait for the salvation of the Lord*, to hope that it will come, though the difficulties that lie in the way of it seem insupportable, to wait till it does come, though it be long delayed, and while we wait to be quiet and silent, not quarrelling with God nor making ourselves uneasy, but acquiescing in the divine disposals. *Father, thy will be done*. If we call this to mind, we may have hope that all will end well at last.

V. That afflictions are really good for us, and, if we bear them aright, will work very much for our good. It is not only good to hope and wait for the salvation, but it is good to be under the trouble in the mean time (*v. 27*): *It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth*. Many of the young men were carried into captivity. To make them easy in it, he tells them that it was good for them to bear the yoke of that captivity, and they would find it so if they would but accommodate themselves to their condition, and labour to answer God's ends in laying that heavy yoke upon them. It is very applicable to the yoke of God's commands. It is good for young people to take that yoke upon them in their youth; we cannot begin too soon to be religious. It will make our duty the more acceptable to God, and easy to ourselves, if we engage in it when we are young. But here it seems to be meant of the yoke of affliction. Many have found it good to bear this in youth; it has made those humble and serious, and has weaned them from the world, who otherwise would have been proud and unruly, and as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. But when do we bear the yoke so that it is really good for us to bear it in our youth? He answers in the following verses, 1. When we are sedate and quiet under our afflictions, when we sit alone and keep silence, do not run to and fro into all companies with our complaints, aggravating our calamities, and quarrelling with the disposals of Providence concerning us, but retire into privacy, that we may in a day of adversity consider, sit alone, that we may converse with God and commune with our own hearts, silencing all discontented distrustful thoughts, and laying our hand upon our mouth, as Aaron, who, under a very severe trial, held his peace. We must keep silence under the yoke as those that have borne it upon us, not wilfully pulled it upon our own necks, but patiently submitted to it when God laid it upon us. When those who are afflicted in their youth accommodate themselves to their afflictions, sit

their necks to the yoke and study to answer God's end in afflicting them, then they will find it good for them to bear it, for it yields *the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who are thus exercised thereby*. 2. When we are humble and patient under our affliction. He gets good by the yoke who *puts his mouth in the dust*, not only *lays his hand upon his mouth*, in token of submission to the will of God in the affliction, but *puts it in the dust*, in token of sorrow, and shame, and self-loathing, at the remembrance of sin, and as one perfectly reduced and reclaimed, and brought as those that are vanquished to *lick the dust*, Ps. lxxii. 9. And we must thus humble ourselves, *if so be there may be hope*, or (as it is in the original) *peradventure there is hope*. If there be any way to acquire and secure a good hope under our afflictions, it is this way, and yet we must be very modest in our expectations of it, must look for it with an *it may be*, as those who own ourselves utterly unworthy of it. Note, Those who are truly humbled for sin will be glad to obtain a good hope, through grace, upon any terms, though they *put their mouth in the dust* for it; and those who would have hope must do so, and ascribe it to free grace if they have any encouragements, which may keep their hearts from sinking into the dust when they put their mouth there. 3. When we are meek and mild towards those who are the instruments of our trouble, and are of a forgiving spirit, v. 30. He gets good by the yoke who *gives his cheek to him that smites him*, and rather *turns the other cheek* (Matt. v. 39) than returns the second blow. Our Lord Jesus has left us an example of this, for he *gave his back to the smiter*, Isa. l. 6. He who can bear contempt and reproach, and not *render railing for railing* and bitterness for bitterness, who, when he is *filled full with reproach*, keeps it to himself, and does not retort it and empty it again upon those who filled him with it, but *pours it out before the Lord* (as those did, Ps. cxliii. 4, whose souls were exceedingly filled with the contempt of the proud), he shall find that *it is good to bear the yoke*, that it shall turn to his spiritual advantage. The sum is, *If tribulation work patience*, that *patience will work experience*, and that *experience a hope that makes not ashamed*.

VI. That God will graciously return to his people with seasonable comforts according to the time that he has afflicted them, v. 31, 32. Therefore the sufferer is thus penitent, thus patient, because he believes that God is gracious and merciful, which is the great inducement both to evangelical repentance and to Christian patience. We may bear ourselves up with this. 1. That, when we are cast down, yet we are not cast off; the father's correcting his son is not a disinheriting of him. 2. That though we may seem to be cast off for a time, while sensible comforts are suspended and desired salva-

tions deferred, yet we are not really cast off, because not *cast off for ever*; the controversy with us shall not be perpetual. 3. That, whatever sorrow we are in, it is what God has allotted us, and his hand is in it. It is he that causes grief, and therefore we may be assured it is ordered wisely and graciously; and it is but *for a season*, and when need is, that we are in *heaviness*, 1 Pet. i. 6. 4. That God has compassions and comforts in store even for those whom he has himself grieved. We must be far from thinking that, though God cause grief, the world will relieve and help us. No; the very same that caused the grief must bring in the favour, or we are undone. *Una cademque manus vulnus openque tulit*—The same hand inflicted the wound and healed it. He has torn, and he will heal us, Hos. vi. 1. 5. That, when God returns to deal graciously with us, it will not be according to our merits, but according to his mercies, according to the multitude, the abundance, of his mercies. So unworthy we are that nothing but an abundant mercy will relieve us; and from that what may we not expect? And God's causing our grief ought to be no discouragement at all to those expectations.

VII. That, when God does cause grief, it is for wise and holy ends, and he takes not delight in our calamities, v. 33. He does indeed *afflict, and grieve the children of men*; all their grievances and afflictions are from him. But he does not do it *willingly*, not *from the heart*; so the word is. 1. He never afflicts us but when we give him cause to do it. He does not dispense his frowns as he does his favours, *ex mero motu*—from his mere good pleasure. If he show us kindness, it is because *so it seems good* unto him; but, if he write bitter things against us, it is because we both deserve them and need them. 2. He does not afflict with pleasure. He delights not in the death of sinners, or the disquiet of saints, but punishes with a kind of reluctance. He comes out of his place to punish, for his place is the mercy-seat. He delights not in the misery of any of his creatures, but, as it respects his own people, he is so far from it that in all their afflictions he is afflicted and his soul is grieved for the misery of Israel. 3. He retains his kindness for his people even when he afflicts them. If he does not *willingly grieve the children of men*, much less his own children. However it be, yet *God is good* to them (Ps. lxxiii. 1), and they may by faith see love in his heart even when they see frowns in his face and a rod in his hand.

VIII. That though he makes use of men as his hand, or rather instruments in his hand, for the correcting of his people, yet he is far from being pleased with the injustice of their proceedings and the wrong they do them, v. 34—36. Though God serves his own purposes by the violence of wicked and unreasonable men, yet it does not there-



fore follow that he countenances that violence, as his oppressed people are sometimes tempted to think. Hab. i. 13, *Wherefore lookest thou upon those that deal treacherously?* Two ways the people of God are injured and oppressed by their enemies, and the prophet here assures us that God does not approve of either of them:—1. If men injure them by force of arms, God does not approve of that. He does not himself *crush under his feet the prisoners of the earth*, but he regards the cry of the prisoners; nor does he approve of men's doing it; nay, he is much displeased with it. It is barbarous to trample on those that are down, and to crush those that are bound and cannot help themselves. 2. If men injure them under colour of law, and in the pretended administration of justice,—if they *turn aside the right of a man*, so that he cannot discover what his rights are or cannot come at them, they are out of his reach,—if they *subvert a man in his cause*, and bring in a wrong verdict, or give a false judgment, let them know, (1.) That God sees them. It is *before the face of the Most High* (v. 35); it is in his sight, under his eye, and is very displeasing to him. They cannot but know it is so, and therefore it is in defiance of him that they do it. He is *the Most High*, whose authority over them they condemn by abusing their authority over their subjects, not considering that *he that is higher than the highest regardeth*, Eccl. v. 8. (2.) That God does not approve of them. More is implied than is expressed. The perverting of justice, and the subverting of the just, are a great affront to God; and, though he may make use of them for the correction of his people, yet he will sooner or later severely reckon with those that do thus. Note, However God may for a time suffer evil-doers to prosper, and serve his own purposes by them, yet he does not therefore approve of their evil doings. *Far be it from God that he should do iniquity*, or countenance those that do it.

37 Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, *when the Lord commandeth it not?* 38 Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good? 39 Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? 40 Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord. 41 Let us lift up our heart with *our hands unto God in the heavens*.

That we may be entitled to the comforts administered to the afflicted in the foregoing verses, and may taste the sweetness of them, we have here the duties of an afflicted state prescribed to us, in the performance of which we may expect those comforts.

I. We must see and acknowledge the hand of God in all the calamities that befall

us at any time, whether personal or public, v. 37, 38. This is here laid down as a great truth, which will help to quiet our spirits under our afflictions and to sanctify them to us. 1. That, whatever men's actions are, it is God that overrules them: *Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass* (that designeth a thing and bring his designs to effect), *if the Lord commandeth it not?* Men can do nothing but according to the counsel of God, nor have any power or success but what is given them from above. *A man's heart devises his way*; he projects and purposes; he says that he will do so and so (Jam. iv. 13); *but the Lord directs his steps* far otherwise than he designed them, and what he contrived and expected does not come to pass, unless it be what God's hand and his counsel had determined before to be done, Prov. xvi. 9; Jer. x. 23. The Chaldeans said that they would destroy Jerusalem, and it came to pass, not because they said it, but because God commanded it and commissioned them to do it. Note, Men are but tools which the great God makes use of, and manages as he pleases, in the government of this lower world; and they cannot accomplish any of their designs without him. 2. That, whatever men's lot is, it is God that orders it: *Out of the mouth of the Most High do not evil and good proceed?* Yes, certainly they do; and it is more emphatically expressed in the original: *Do not this evil, and this good, proceed out of the mouth of the Most High?* Is it not what he has ordained and appointed for us? Yes, certainly it is; and for the reconciling of us to our own afflictions, whatever they be, this general truth must thus be particularly applied. This comfort I receive from the hand of God, and shall I not receive that evil also? so Job argues, ch. ii. 10. Are we healthful or sickly, rich or poor? Do we succeed in our designs, or are we crossed in them? It is all what God orders; *every man's judgment proceeds from him*. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away: he forms the light and creates the darkness, as he did at first. Note, All the events of divine Providence are the products of a divine counsel; whatever is done God has the directing of it, and the works of his hands agree with the words of his mouth; *he speaks, and it is done*, so easily, so effectually are all his purposes fulfilled.

II. We must not quarrel with God for any affliction that he lays upon us at any time (v. 39): *Wherefore does a living man complain?* The prophet here means to check himself for the complaint he had made in the former part of the chapter, whereas he seemed to reflect upon God as unkind and severe. "Do I well to be angry? Why do I fret thus?" Those who in their haste have chidden with God must, in the reflection, chide themselves for it. From the doctrine of God's sovereign and universal

providence, which he had asserted in the verses before, he draws this inference, *Wherefore does a living man complain?* What God does we must not open our mouths against, Ps. xxxix. 9. Those that blame their lot reproach him that allotted it to them. The sufferers in the captivity must submit to the will of God in all their sufferings. Note, Though we may pour out our complaints before God, we must never exhibit any complaints against God. What! Shall a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? The reasons here urged are very cogent. 1. We are men; let us herein show ourselves men. Shall a man complain? And again, a man! We are men, and not brutes, reasonable creatures, who should act with reason, who should look upward and look forward, and both ways may fetch considerations enough to silence our complaints. We are men, and not children that cry for every thing that hurts them. We are men, and not gods, subjects, not lords; we are not our own masters, not our own carvers; we are bound, and must obey, must submit. We are men, and not angels, and therefore cannot expect to be free from troubles as they are; we are not inhabitants of that world where there is no sorrow, but this where there is nothing but sorrow. We are men, and not devils, are not in that deplorable, helpless, hopeless, state that they are in, but have something to comfort ourselves with which they have not. 2. We are living men. Through the good hand of our God upon us we are alive yet, though dying daily; and shall a living man complain? No; he has more reason to be thankful for life than to complain of any of the burdens and calamities of life. Our lives are frail and forfeited, and yet we are alive; now *the living, the living, they should praise*, and not complain (Isa. xxxviii. 19); while there is life there is hope, and therefore, instead of complaining that things are bad, we should encourage ourselves with the hope that they will be better. 3. We are sinful men, and that which we complain of is the just *punishment of our sins*; nay, it is far less than our iniquities have deserved. We have little reason to complain of our trouble, for it is our own doing; we may thank ourselves. Our own wickedness corrects us, Prov. xix. 3. We have no reason to quarrel with God, for he is righteous in it; he is the governor of the world, and it is necessary that he should maintain the honour of his government by chastising the disobedient. Are we suffering for our sins? Then let us not complain; for we have other work to do; instead of repining, we must be repenting; and, as an evidence that God is reconciled to us, we must be endeavouring to reconcile ourselves to his holy will. Are we *punished for our sins*? It is our wisdom then to submit, and to kiss the rod; for, if we still walk contrary to

God, he will punish us yet seven times more, *for when he judges he will overcome*. But, if we accommodate ourselves to him, though we be *chastened of the Lord* we shall not be *condemned with the world*.

III. We must set ourselves to answer God's intention in afflicting us, which is to bring sin to our remembrance, and to bring us home to himself, v. 40. These are the two things which our afflictions should put us upon. 1. A serious consideration of ourselves and a reflection upon our past lives. *Let us search and try our ways*, search what they have been, and then try whether they have been right and good or no; search as for a malefactor in disguise, that flees and hides himself, and then try whether guilty or not guilty. Let conscience be employed both to search and to try, and let it have leave to deal faithfully, to accomplish a diligent search and to make an impartial trial. *Let us try our ways*, that by them we may try ourselves, for we are to judge of our state not by our faint wishes, but by our steps, not by one particular step, but by our ways, the ends we aim at, the rules we go by, and the agreeableness of the temper of our minds and the tenour of our lives to those ends and those rules. When we are in affliction it is seasonable to *consider our ways* (Hag. i. 5), that what is amiss may be repented of and amended for the future, and so we may answer the intention of the affliction. We are apt, in times of public calamity, to reflect upon other people's ways, and lay blame upon them; whereas our business is to *search and try our own ways*. We have work enough to do at home; we must each of us say, "What have I done? What have I contributed to the public flames?" that we may each of us mend one, and then we should all be mended. 2. A sincere conversion to God: "Let us *turn again to the Lord*, to him who is turned against us and whom we have turned from; to him let us turn by repentance and reformation, as to our owner and ruler. We have been with him, and it has never been well with us since we forsook him; let us therefore now turn again to him." This must accompany the former and be the fruit of it; *therefore we must search and try our ways*, that we may turn from the evil of them to God. This was the method David took. Ps. cxix. 59, *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies*.

IV. We must offer up ourselves to God, and our best affections and services, in the flames of devotion, v. 41. When we are in affliction, 1. We must look up to God as a *God in the heavens*, infinitely above us, and who has an incontestable dominion over us; *for the heavens do rule*, and are therefore not to be quarrelled with, but submitted to. 2. We must pray to him, with a believing expectation to receive mercy from him; for that



is implied in our *lifting up our hands* to him (a gesture commonly used in prayer and sometimes put for it, as Ps. cxli. 2, *Let the lifting up of my hands be as the evening sacrifice*); it signifies our requesting mercy from him and our readiness to receive that mercy. (3.) Our hearts must go along with our prayers. We must *lift up our hearts with our hands*, as we must pour out our souls with our words. It is the heart that God looks at in that and every other service; for what will a sacrifice without a heart avail? If inward impressions be not in some measure answerable to outward expressions, we do but mock God and deceive ourselves. Praying is lifting up the soul to God (Ps. xxv. 1) as to *our Father in heaven*; and the soul that hopes to be with God in heaven for ever will thus, by frequent acts of devotion, be still learning the way thither and pressing forward in that way.

42 We have transgressed and have rebelled: thou hast not pardoned. 43 Thou hast covered with anger, and persecuted us: thou hast slain, thou hast not pitied. 44 Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through. 45 Thou hast made us *as* the off-scouring and refuse in the midst of the people. 46 All our enemies have opened their mouths against us. 47 Fear and a snare is come upon us, desolation and destruction. 48 Mine eye runneth down with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people. 49 Mine eye trickleth down, and ceaseth not, without any intermission, 50 Till the Lord look down, and behold from heaven. 51 Mine eye affecteth mine heart because of all the daughters of my city. 52 Mine enemies chased me sore, like a bird, without cause. 53 They have cut off my life in the dungeon, and cast a stone upon me. 54 Waters flowed over mine head; *then* I said, I am cut off.

It is easier to chide ourselves for complaining than to chide ourselves out of it. The prophet had owned that a living man should not complain, as if he checked himself for his complaints in the former part of the chapter; and yet here the clouds return after the rain and the wound bleeds afresh: for great pains must be taken with a troubled spirit to bring it into temper.

1. They confess the righteousness of God in afflicting them (v. 42): *We have transgressed and have rebelled*. Note, It becomes us, when we are in trouble, to justify God, by owning our sins, and laying the load

upon ourselves for them. Call sin a transgression, call it a rebellion, and you do not misal it. This is the result of their searching and trying their ways; the more they enquired into them the worse they found them. Yet,

1. They complain of the afflictions they are under, not without some reflections upon God, which we are not to imitate, but, under the sharpest trials, must always thank and speak highly and kindly of him.

1. They complain of his frowns and the tokens of his displeasure against them. Their sins were repented of, and yet (v. 42). *Thou hast not pardoned*. They had not the assurance and comfort of the pardon; the judgments brought upon them for their sins were not removed, and therefore they thought they could not say the sin was pardoned, which was a mistake, but a common mistake with the people of God when their souls are cast down and disquieted within them. Their case was really pitiable, yet they complain, *Thou hast not pitied*, v. 43. Their enemies persecuted and slew them, but that was not the worst of it; they were but the instruments in God's hand: "*Thou hast persecuted us, and thou hast slain us*, though we expected thou wouldst protect and deliver us." They complain that there was a wall of partition between them and God, and, (1.) This hindered God's favours from coming down upon them. The reflected beams of God's kindness to them used to be the beauty of Israel; but now "*thou hast covered us with anger*, so that our glory is concealed and gone; now God is angry with us, and we do not appear that illustrious people that we have formerly been thought to be." Or, "*Thou hast covered us up* as men that are buried are covered up and forgotten." (2.) It hindered their prayers from coming up unto God (v. 44): "*Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud*," not like that bright cloud in which he took possession of the temple, which enabled the worshippers to draw near to him, but like that in which he came down upon Mount Sinai, which obliged the people to stand at a distance. "This cloud is so thick that our prayers seem as if they were lost in it; they cannot pass through; we cannot obtain an audience." Note, The prolonging of troubles is sometimes a temptation, even to praying people, to question whether God be what they have always believed him to be, a prayer-hearing God.

2. They complain of the contempt of their neighbours and the reproach and ignominy they were under (v. 45): "*Thou hast made us as the off-scouring*, or scrapings, of the first floor, which are thrown to the dunghill." This St. Paul refers to in his account of the sufferings of the apostles. 1 Cor. iv. 13, *We are made as the filth of the world and are the off-scouring of all things*. "We are the refuse, or dross, in the midst of the people, trodden upon by every body, and looked

upon as the vilest of the nations, and good for nothing but to be cast out as *salt* which has lost its savour. Our enemies have opened their mouths against us (v. 46), have gaped upon us as roaring lions, to swallow us up, or made mouths at us, or have taken liberty to say what they please of us." These complaints we had before, *ch. ii. 15, 16*. Note, It is common for base and ill-natured men to run upon, and run down, those that have fallen into the depths of distress from the height of honour. But this they brought upon themselves by sin. If they had not made themselves vile, their enemies could not have made them so: but *therefore men call them reprobate silver, because the Lord has rejected them* for rejecting him.

3. They complain of the lamentable destruction that their enemies made of them (v. 47): *Fear and a snare have come upon us*; the enemies have not only terrified us with those alarms, but prevailed against us by their stratagems, and surprised us with the ambushes they laid for us; and then follows nothing but *desolation and destruction, the destruction of the daughter of my people* (v. 48), *of all the daughters of my city, v. 51*. The enemies, having taken some of them like a bird in a snare, chased others as a harmless bird is chased by a bird of prey (v. 52): *My enemies chased me sorely like a bird* which is beaten from bush to bush, as Saul hunted David like a partridge. Thus restless was the enmity of their persecutors, and yet causeless. They have done it *without cause*, without any provocation given them. Though God was righteous, they were unrighteous. David often complains of those that *hated him without cause*; and such are the enemies of Christ and his church, *John xv. 25*. Their enemies chased them till they had quite prevailed over them (v. 53): *They have cut off my life in the dungeon*. They have shut up their captives in close and dark prisons, where they are as it were cut off *from the land of the living* (as v. 6), or the state and kingdom are sunk and ruined, the life and being of them are gone, and they are as it were thrown into the dungeon or grave and a stone cast upon them, such as used to be rolled to the door of the sepulchres. They look upon the Jewish nation as dead and buried, and imagine that there is no possibility of its resurrection. Thus Ezekiel saw it, in vision, *a valley full of dead and dry bones*. Their destruction is compared not only to the burying of a dead man, but to the sinking of a living man into the water, who cannot long be a living man there, v. 54. *Waters of affliction flowed over my head*. The deluge prevailed and quite overwhelmed them. The Chaldean forces broke in upon them as the breaking forth of waters, which rose so high as to flow over their heads; they could not wade, they could not swim, and therefore must unavoidably sink. Note, The distresses

of God's people sometimes prevail to such a degree that they cannot find any footing for their faith, nor keep their head above water, with any comfortable expectation.

4. They complain of their own excessive grief and fear upon this account. (1.) The afflicted church is drowned in tears, and the prophet for her (v. 48, 49): *My eye runs down with rivers of water*, so abundant was their weeping; *it trickles down and ceases not*, so constant was their weeping, *without any intermission*, there being no relaxation of their miseries. The distemper was in continual extremity, and they had no better day. It is added (v. 51), "*My eye affects my heart*. My seeing eye affects my heart. The more I look upon the desolations of the city and country the more I am grieved. Which way soever I cast my eye, I see that which renews my sorrow, even because of all the daughters of my city," all the neighbouring towns, which were as daughters to Jerusalem the mother-city. Or, *My weeping eye affects my heart*; the venting of the grief, instead of easing it, did but increase and exasperate it. Or, *My eye melts my soul*; I have quite wept away my spirits; not only my eye is consumed with grief, but my soul and my life are spent with it, *Ps. xxxi. 9, 10*. Great and long grief exhausts the spirits, and brings not only many a gray head, but many a green head too, to the grave. I weep, says the prophet, *more than all the daughters of my city* (so the margin reads it); he outdid even those of the tender sex in the expressions of grief. And it is no diminution to any to be much in tears for the sins of sinners and the sufferings of saints; our Lord Jesus was so; for, *when he came near, he beheld this same city and wept over it*, which the daughters of Jerusalem did not. (2.) She is overwhelmed with fears, not only grieves for what is, but fears worse, and gives up all for gone (v. 54): "*Then I said, I am cut off, ruined, and see no hope of recovery; I am as one dead*." Note, Those that are cast down are commonly tempted to think themselves cast off, *Ps. xxxi. 22; Jon. ii. 4*.

5. In the midst of these sad complaints here is one word of comfort, by which it appears that their case was not altogether so bad as they made it, v. 50. We continue thus weeping till the Lord look down and behold from heaven. This intimates, (1.) That they were satisfied that God's gracious regard to them in their miseries would be an effectual redress of all their grievances. "If God, who now covers himself with a cloud, as if he took no notice of our troubles (*Job xxii. 13*), would but shine forth, all would be well; if he look upon us, we shall be saved," *Ps. lxxx. 19; Dan. ix. 17*. Bad as the case is, one favourable look from heaven will set all to rights. (2.) That they had hopes that he would at length look graciously upon them and relieve them; nay, they take it for



granted that he will: "Though he contend long, he will not contend for ever, though we deserve that he should." (3.) That while they continued weeping they continued waiting, and neither did nor would expect relief and succour from any hand but his; nothing shall comfort them but his gracious returns, nor shall any thing wipe tears from their eyes till he look down. Their eyes, which now run down with water, shall still wait upon the Lord their God until he have mercy upon them, Ps. cxxiii. 2.

55 I called upon thy name, O LORD, out of the low dungeon. 56 Thou hast heard my voice: hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry. 57 Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not. 58 O LORD, thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul; thou hast redeemed my life. 59 O LORD, thou hast seen my wrong: judge thou my cause. 60 Thou hast seen all their vengeance and all their imaginations against me. 61 Thou hast heard their reproach, O LORD, and all their imaginations against me; 62 The lips of those that rose up against me, and their device against me all the day. 63 Behold their sitting down, and their rising up; I am their musick. 64 Render unto them a recompence, O LORD, according to the work of their hands. 65 Give them sorrow of heart, thy curse unto them. 66 Persecute and destroy them in anger from under the heavens of the LORD.

We may observe throughout this chapter a struggle in the prophet's breast between sense and faith, fear and hope; he complains and then comforts himself, yet drops his comforts and returns again to his complaints, as Ps. xlii. But, as there, so here, faith gets the last word and comes off a conqueror; for in these verses he concludes with some comfort. And here are two things with which he comforts himself:—

I. His experience of God's goodness even in his affliction. This may refer to the prophet's personal experience, with which he encourages himself in reference to the public troubles. He that has seasonably succoured particular saints will not fail the church in general. Or it may include the remnant of good people that were among the Jews, who had found that it was not in vain to wait upon God. In three things the prophet and his pious friends had found God good to them:—1. He had heard their prayers; though they had been ready to fear that the cloud of wrath was such as their prayers

could not pass through (v. 44), yet upon second thoughts, or at least upon further trial, they find it otherwise, and that God had not said unto them, *Seek you me in vain*. When they were in the low dungeon, as free among the dead they called upon God's name (v. 55); their weeping did not hinder praying. Note, Though we are cast into ever so low a dungeon, we may thence find a way of access to God in the highest heavens. Out of the depths have I cried unto thee (Ps. cxxx. 1), as Jonah out of the whale's belly. And could God hear them out of the low dungeon, and would he? Yes, he did: *Thou hast heard my voice*; and some read the following words as carrying on the same thankful acknowledgment: *Thou didst not hide thy ear at my breathing, at my cry*; and the original will bear that reading. We read it as a petition for further audience: *Hide not thy ear*. God's having heard our voice when we cried to him, even out of the low dungeon, is an encouragement for us to hope that he will not at any time hide his ear. Observe how he calls prayer *his breathing*; for in prayer we breathe towards God, we breathe after him. Though we be but weak in prayer, cannot cry aloud, but only breathe in groanings that cannot be uttered, yet we shall not be neglected if we be sincere. Prayer is the breath of the new man, sucking in the air of mercy in petitions and returning it in praises; it is both the evidence and the maintenance of the spiritual life. Some read it, *at my gasping*. "When I lay gasping for life, and ready to expire, and thought I was breathing my last, then thou tookest cognizance of my distressed case." 2. He had silenced their fears and quieted their spirits (v. 57): *"Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee; thou didst graciously assure me of thy presence with me, and give me to see thee nigh unto me, whereas I had thought thee to be at a distance from me."* Note, When we draw nigh to God in a way of duty we may by faith see him drawing nigh to us in a way of mercy. But this was not all: *Thou saidst, Fear not*. This was the language of God's prophets preaching to them not to fear (Isa. xli. 10, 13, 14), of his providence preventing those things which they were afraid of, and of his grace quieting their minds, and making them easy, by the witness of his Spirit with their spirits that they were his people still, though in distress, and therefore ought not to fear. 3. He had already begun to appear for them (v. 58): *"O Lord! thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul"* (that is, as it follows), *"thou hast redeemed my life, hast rescued that out of the hands of those who would have taken it away, hast avenged that when it was ready to be swallowed up, hast given me that for a prey."* And this is an encouragement to them to hope that he would yet further appear for them: *"Thou hast delivered my soul from death, and therefore wilt deliver my feet from falling; thou*

hast pleaded the causes of my life, and therefore wilt plead my other causes."

II. He comforts himself with an appeal to God's justice, and (in order to the sentence of that) to his omniscience.

1. He appeals to God's knowledge of the matter of fact, how very spiteful and malicious his enemies were (v. 59): "*O Lord! thou hast seen my wrong*, that I have done no wrong at all, but suffer a great deal." He that knows all things knew, (1.) The malice they had against him: "*Thou hast seen all their vengeance*, how they desire to do me a mischief, as if it were by way of reprisal for some great injury I had done them." Note, We should consider, to our terror and caution, that God knows all the revengeful thoughts we have in our minds against others, and therefore we should not allow of those thoughts nor harbour them, and that he knows all the revengeful thoughts others have causelessly in their minds against us, and therefore we should not be afraid of them, but leave it to him to protect us from them. (2.) The designs and projects they had laid to do him a mischief: *Thou hast seen all their imaginations against me* (v. 60), and again, "*Thou hast heard all their imaginations against me* (v. 61), both the desire and the device they have to ruin me; whether it show itself in word or deed, it is known to thee; nay, though the products of it are not to be seen nor heard, yet their device against me all the day is perceived and understood by him to whom all things are naked and open." Note, The most secret contrivances of the church's enemies are perfectly known to the church's God, from whom they can hide nothing. (3.) The contempt and calumny wherewith they loaded him, all that they spoke slightly of him, and all that they spoke reproachfully: "*Thou hast heard their reproach* (v. 61), all the bad characters they give me, laying to my charge things that I know not, all the methods they use to make me odious and contemptible, even the *lips of those that rose up against me* (v. 62), the contumelious language they use whenever they speak of me, and that at their sitting down and rising up, when they lie down at night and get up in the morning, when they sit down to their meat and with their company, and when they rise from both, still I am their music; they make themselves and one another merry with my miseries, as the Philistines made sport with Samson." Jerusalem was the tabret they played upon. Perhaps they had some tune or play, some opera or interlude, that was called *the destruction of Jerusalem*, which, though in the nature of a tragedy, was very entertaining to those who wished ill to the holy city. Note, God will one day call sinners to an account for all the hard speeches which they have spoken against him and his people, Jude 15.

2. He appeals to God's judgment upon

this fact: "*Lord, thou hast seen my wrong*; there is no need of any evidence to prove it, nor any prosecutor to enforce and aggravate it; thou seest it in its true colours; and now I leave it with thee. *Judge thou my cause*, v. 59. Let them be dealt with," (1.) "As they deserve (v. 64): *Render to them a recompence according to the work of their hands*. Let them be dealt with as they have dealt with us; let thy hand be against them as their hand has been against us. They have created us a great deal of vexation; now, *Lord, give them sorrow of heart* (v. 65), *perplexity of heart*" (so some read it); "let them be surrounded with threatening mischiefs on all sides, and not be able to see their way out. Give them *despondency of heart*" (so others read it); "let them be driven to despair, and give themselves up for gone." God can entangle the head that thinks itself clearest, and sink the heart that thinks itself stoutest. (2.) "Let them be dealt with according to the threatenings: *Thy curse unto them*; that is, let thy curse come upon them, all the evils that are pronounced in thy word against the enemies of thy people, v. 65. They have loaded us with curses; as they loved cursing, so let it come unto them, thy curse which will make them truly miserable. Theirs is causeless, and therefore fruitless, it shall not come; but thine is just, and shall take effect. Those whom thou cursest are cursed indeed. Let the curse be executed, v. 66. *Persecute and destroy them in anger*, as they persecute and destroy us in their anger. *Destroy them from under the heavens of the Lord*; let them have no benefit of the light and influence of the heavens. Destroy them in such a manner that all who see it may say, It is a destruction from the Almighty, who sits in the heavens and laughs at them (Ps. ii. 4), and may own that *the heavens do rule*," Dan. iv. 26. What is said of the idols is here said of their worshippers (who in this also shall be like unto them), *They shall perish from under these heavens*, Jer. x. 11. They shall be not only excluded from the happiness of the invisible heavens, but cut off from the comfort even of these visible ones, which are the *heavens of the Lord* (Ps. cxv. 16) and which those therefore are unworthy to be taken under the protection of who rebel against him.

#### CHAP. IV.

This chapter is another single alphabet of Lamentations for the destruction of Jerusalem, like those in the first two chapters. I. The prophet here laments the injuries and indignities done to those to whom respect used to be shown, ver. 1, 2. II. He laments the direful effects of the famine to which they were reduced by the siege, ver. 3-10. III. He laments the taking and sacking of Jerusalem and its amazing desolations, ver. 11, 12. IV. He acknowledges that the sins of their leaders were the cause of all these calamities, ver. 13-16. V. He gives up all as doomed to utter ruin, for their enemies were every way too hard for them, ver. 17-20. VI. He foretells the destruction of the Edomites who triumphed in Jerusalem's fall, ver. 21. VII. He foretells the return of the captivity of Zion at last, ver. 22.

**H**OW is the gold become dim! *how* is the most fine gold changed!



the stones of the sanctuary are poured out in the top of every street. 2 The precious sons of Zion; comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter! 3 Even the sea monsters draw out the breast, they give suck to their young ones: the daughter of my people *is become* cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness. 4 The tongue of the sucking child cleaveth to the roof of his mouth for thirst: the young children ask bread, *and* no man breaketh *it* unto them. 5 They that did feed delicately are desolate in the streets: they that were brought up in scarlet embrace dung-hills. 6 For the punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom, that was overthrown as in a moment, and no hands stayed on her. 7 Her Nazarites were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk, they were more ruddy in body than rubies, their polishing *was* of sapphire: 8 Their visage is blacker than a coal; they are not known in the streets: their skin cleaveth to their bones; it is withered, it is become like a stick. 9 *They that be* slain with the sword are better than *they that be* slain with hunger: for these pine away, stricken through for *want* of the fruits of the field. 10 The hands of the pitiful women have sodden their own children: they were their meat in the destruction of the daughter of my people. 11 The Lord hath accomplished his fury; he hath poured out his fierce anger, and hath kindled a fire in Zion, and it hath devoured the foundations thereof. 12 The kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem.

The elegy in this chapter begins with a lamentation of the very sad and doleful change which the judgments of God had made in Jerusalem. The city that was formerly *as gold, as the most fine gold*, so rich and splendid, *the perfection of beauty and the joy of the whole earth*, has become dim, and is changed, has lost its lustre, lost its value, is

not what it was; it has become dross. Alas! what an alteration is here!

I. The temple was laid waste, which was the glory of Jerusalem and its protection. It is given up into the hands of the enemy. And some understand the gold spoken of (v. 1) to be the *gold of the temple*, the fine gold with which it was overlaid (1 Kings vi. 22); when the temple was burned the gold of it was smoked and sullied, as if it had been of little value. It was thrown among the rubbish; it *was changed*, converted to common uses and made nothing of. The *stones of the sanctuary*, which were curiously wrought, were thrown down by the Chaldeans, when they demolished it, or were brought down by the force of the fire, and were *poured out*, and thrown about *in the top of every street*; they lay mingled without distinction among the common ruins. When the God of the sanctuary was by sin provoked to withdraw no wonder that the stones of the sanctuary were thus profaned.

II. The princes and priests, who were in a special manner the *sons of Zion*, were trampled upon and abused, v. 2. Both the house of God and the house of David were in Zion. The sons of both those houses were upon this account precious, that they were heirs to the privileges of those two covenants of priesthood and royalty. They were *comparable to fine gold*. Israel was more rich in them than in treasures of gold and silver. But now they are *esteemed as earthen pitchers*; they are broken as *earthen pitchers*, thrown by as vessels in which there is no pleasure. They have grown poor, and are brought into captivity, and thereby are rendered mean and despicable, and every one treads upon them and insults over them. Note, The contempt put upon God's people ought to be matter of lamentation to us.

III. Little children were starved for want of bread and water, v. 3, 4. The nursing-mothers, having no meat for themselves, had no milk for the babes at their breast, so that, though in disposition they were really compassionate, yet in fact they seemed to be cruel, *like the ostriches in the wilderness, that leave their eggs in the dust* (Job xxxix. 14, 15); having no food for their children, they were forced to neglect them and do what they could to forget them, because it was a pain to them to think of them when they had nothing for them: *in this* they were worse than the seals, or *sea-monsters*, or *whales* (as some render it), *for they drew out the breast, and gave suck to their young, which the daughter of my people will not do*. Children cannot shift for themselves as grown people can; and therefore it was the more painful to see *the tongue of the sucking-child cleave to the roof of his mouth for thirst*, because there was not a drop of water to moisten it; and to hear the young children, that could but just speak, *ask bread* of their parents, who had none to give them.

no, nor any friend that could supply them. As doleful as our thoughts are of this case, so thankful should our thoughts be of the great plenty we enjoy, and the food convenient we have for ourselves and for our children, and for those of our own house.

IV. Persons of good rank were reduced to extreme poverty, v. 5. Those who were well-born and well-bred, and had been accustomed to the best, both for food and clothing, who had *fed delicately*, had every thing that was curious and nice (they call it *eating well*, whereas those only eat well who eat to the glory of God), and *fared sumptuously every day*; they had not only been *advanced to the scarlet*, but from their beginning were *brought up in scarlet*, and were never acquainted with any thing mean or ordinary. They were *brought up upon scarlet* (so the word is); their foot-cloths, and the carpets they walked on, were scarlet, yet these, being stripped of all by the war, are *desolate in the streets*, have not a house to put their head in, nor a bed to lie on, nor clothes to cover them, nor fire to warm them. They *embrace dunghills*; on them they were glad to lie to get a little rest, and perhaps raked in the dunghills for something to eat, as the prodigal son who *would fain have filled his belly with the husks*. Note, Those who live in the greatest pomp and plenty know not what straits they may be reduced to before they die; as sometimes the *needy are raised out of the dunghill* (Ps. cxliii. 7), so there are instances of the *wealthy* being brought to the *dunghill*. Those who *were full have hired out themselves for bread*, 1 Sam. ii. 5. It is therefore the wisdom of those who have abundance not to use themselves too nicely, for then hardships, when they come, will be doubly hard, Deut. xxviii. 56.

V. Persons who were eminent for dignity, nay, perhaps for sanctity, shared with others in the common calamity, v. 7, 8. *Her Nazarites* are extremely changed. Some understand it only of her honourable ones, the young gentlemen, who were very clean, and neat, and well-dressed, washed and perfumed; but I see not why we may not understand it of those devout people among them who *separated themselves to the Lord* by the Nazarites' vow, Num. vi. 2. That there were such among them in the most degenerate times appears from Amos ii. 11, *I raised up of your young men for Nazarites*. These *Nazarites*, though they were not to cut their hair, yet by reason of their temperate diet, their frequent washings, and especially the pleasure they had in devoting themselves to God and conversing with him, which made their faces to shine as *Moses's*, were *purer than snow* and *whiter than milk*; drinking no wine nor strong drink, they had a more healthful complexion and cheerful countenance than those who regaled themselves daily with the blood of the grape, as

*Daniel* and his fellows with *pulse and water*. Or it may denote the great respect and veneration which all good people had for them; though perhaps to the eye they had no *form nor comeliness*, yet, being separated to the Lord, they were valued as if they had been *more ruddy than rubies* and *their polishing had been of sapphire*. But now *their visage is marred* (as is said of Christ, Isa. lii. 14); it is *blacker than a coal*; they look miserably, partly through hunger and partly through grief and perplexity. They are *not known in the streets*; those who respected them now take no notice of them, and those who had been intimately acquainted with them now scarcely knew them, their countenance was so altered by the miseries that attended the long siege. *Their skin cleaves to their bones*, their flesh being quite consumed and wasted away; it is *withered*; it has *become like a stick*, as dry and hard as a piece of wood. Note, It is a thing to be much lamented that even those who are separated to God are yet, when desolating judgments are abroad, often involved with others in the common calamity.

VI. Jerusalem came down slowly, and died a lingering death; for the famine contributed more to her destruction than any other judgment whatsoever. Upon this account the destruction of *Jerusalem was greater than that of Sodom* (v. 6), for that was *overthrown in a moment*; one shower of fire and brimstone dispatched it; *no hand staid on her*; she did not endure any long siege, as Jerusalem has done; she fell immediately into the *hands of the Lord*, who strikes home at a blow, and did not *fall into the hands of man*, who, being weak, is long in doing execution, Judg. viii. 21. Jerusalem is kept many months upon the rack, in pain and misery, and dies by inches, dies so as to feel herself die. And, when the iniquity of Jerusalem is more aggravated than that of Sodom, no wonder that the punishment of it is so. Sodom never had the means of grace that Jerusalem had, the oracles of God and his prophets, and therefore the condemnation of Jerusalem will be *more intolerable* than that of Sodom, Matt. xi. 23, 24. The extremity of the famine is here set forth by two frightful instances of it:—1. The tedious deaths that it was the cause of (v. 9); many were slain with hunger, were famished to death, their stores being spent, and the public stores so nearly spent that they could not have any relief out of them. They were *stricken through, for want of the fruits of the field*; those who were starved were as sure to die as if they had been stabbed and stricken through; only their case was much more miserable. Those who *are slain with the sword* are soon put out of their pain; *in a moment they go down to the grave*, Job xxi. 13. They have not the terror of seeing death make its advances towards them, and scarcely feel it when the



blow is given; it is but one sharp struggle, and the work is done. And, if we be ready for another world, we need not be afraid of a short passage to it; the quicker the better. But those who die by famine pine away; hunger preys upon their spirits and wastes them gradually; nay, and it frets their spirits, and fills them with vexation, and is as great a torture to the mind as to the body. There are *bands in their death*, Ps. lxxiii. 4. 2. The barbarous murders that it was the occasion of (v. 10): *The hands of the pitiful women have first slain and then sodden their own children*. This was lamented before (ch. ii. 20); and it was a thing to be greatly lamented that any should be so wicked as to do it and that they should be brought to such extremities as to be tempted to it. But this horrid effect of long sieges had been threatened in general (Lev. xxvi. 29, Deut. xxviii. 53), and particularly against Jerusalem in the siege of the Chaldeans, Jer. xix. 9; Ezek. v. 10. The case was sad enough that they had not wherewithal to feed their children and make meat for them (v. 4), but much worse that they could find in their hearts to feed upon their children and make meat of them. I know not whether to make it an instance of the power of necessity or of the power of iniquity; but, as the Gentile idolaters were justly *given up to vile affections* (Rom. i. 26), so these Jewish idolaters, and the women particularly, who had *made cakes to the queen of heaven* and taught their children to do so too, were *stripped of natural affection* and that to their own children. Being thus left to *dishonour their own nature* was a righteous judgment upon them for the dishonour they had done to God.

VII. Jerusalem comes down utterly and wonderfully. 1. The destruction of Jerusalem is a complete destruction (v. 11): *The Lord has accomplished his fury*; he has made thorough work of it, has executed all that he purposed in wrath against Jerusalem, and has remitted no part of the sentence. He has poured out the full vials of his fierce anger, poured them out to the bottom, even the dregs of them. He has *kindled a fire in Zion*, which has not only consumed the houses, and levelled them with the ground, but, beyond what other fires do, has *devoured the foundations thereof*, as if they were to be no more built upon. 2. It is an amazing destruction, v. 12. It was a surprise to the kings of the earth, who are acquainted with, and inquisitive about, the state of their neighbours; nay, it was so to *all the inhabitants of the world* who knew Jerusalem, or had ever heard or read of it; they *could not have believed that the adversary and enemy would ever enter into the gates of Jerusalem*; for, (1.) They knew that Jerusalem was strongly fortified, not only by walls and bulwarks, but by the numbers and strength of its inhabitants; the strong hold of Zion was thought

to be impregnable. (2.) They knew that it was the *city of the great King*, where the Lord of the whole earth had in a more peculiar manner his residence; it was the holy city, and therefore they thought that it was so much under the divine protection that it would be in vain for any of its enemies to make an attack upon it. (3.) They knew that many an attempt made upon it had been baffled, witness that of Sennacherib. They were therefore amazed when they heard of the Chaldeans making themselves masters of it, and concluded that it was certainly by an immediate hand of God that Jerusalem was given up to them; it was by a commission from him that the enemy broke through and entered the gates of Jerusalem.

13 For the sins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her priests, that have shed the blood of the just in the midst of her, 14 They have wandered as blind men in the streets, they have polluted themselves with blood, so that men could not touch their garments. 15 They cried unto them, Depart ye; it is unclean; depart, depart, touch not: when they fled away and wandered, they said among the heathen, They shall no more sojourn there. 16 The anger of the Lord hath divided them; he will no more regard them: they respected not the persons of the priests, they favoured not the elders. 17 As for us, our eyes as yet failed for our vain help: in our watching we have watched for a nation that could not save us. 18 They hunt our steps, that we cannot go in our streets: our end is near, our days are fulfilled; for our end is come. 19 Our persecutors are swifter than the eagles of the heaven: they pursued us upon the mountains, they laid wait for us in the wilderness. 20 The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, was taken in their pits, of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen.

We have here,

1. The sins they were charged with, for which God brought this destruction upon them, and which served to justify God in it (v. 13, 14): It is for the *sins of her prophets*, and the *iniquities of her priests*. Not that the people were innocent; no, they loved to have it so (Jer. v. 31), and it was to please them that the prophets and priests did as they

did; but the fault is chiefly laid upon them, who should have taught them better, should have reproved and admonished them, and told them what would be in the end hereof; of the hands of those watchmen who did not give them warning will their blood be required. Note, Nothing ripens a people more for ruin, nor fills the measure faster, than the sins of their priests and prophets. The particular sin charged upon them is persecution; the false prophets and corrupt priests joined their power and interest to shed the blood of the just in the midst of her, the blood of God's prophets and of those that adhered to them. They not only shed the blood of their innocent children, whom they sacrificed to Moloch, but the blood of the righteous men that were among them, whom they sacrificed to that more cruel idol of enmity to the truth and true religion. This was that sin which the Lord would not pardon (2 Kings xxiv. 4) and which brought the last destruction upon Jerusalem (Jam. v. 6): *You have condemned and killed the just.* And the priests and prophets were the ringleaders in persecution, as in Christ's time the chief priests and scribes were the men that incensed the people against him, who otherwise would have persisted in their hosannas. Now these are those that *wandered as blind men in the streets*, v. 14. They strayed from the paths of justice, were blind to every thing that is good, but to do evil they were quick-sighted. God says of corrupt judges, *They know not, neither do they understand; they walk in darkness* (Ps. lxxxii. 5); and Christ says of the corrupt teachers, *They are blind leaders of the blind*, Matt. xv. 14. They have so polluted themselves with innocent blood, the blood of the saints, that men could not touch their garments; they made themselves odious to all about them, so that good men were as shy of touching them as of touching a dead body, which contracted a ceremonial pollution, or of touching the bloody clothes of one slain, which tender spirits care not to do. There is nothing that will make prophets and priests to be abhorred so much as a spirit of persecution.

II. The testimony of their neighbours produced in evidence against them, both to convict them of sin and to show the equity of God's proceedings against them. Some that have grown very impudent in sin boast that they *care not what people say of them*; but God, by the prophet, would have the Jews to take notice of what people said of them and what was the opinion of the standers by concerning them (v. 15, 16), what they said, nay, what they *cried unto them*, especially to the corrupt priests and prophets, *among the heathen*. 1. They upbraided them with their pretended purity, while they lived in all manner of real iniquity. They cried to them, "*Depart you; it is unclean.* You were so precise that you would not touch a Gentile,

but cried, *Depart, depart; stand by thyself. I am holier than thou,*" Isa. lxxv. 5. Thus the prosecutors of Christ would not go into the judgment-hall, lest they should be defiled. "But can you now keep the Gentiles from touching you, when God has delivered you into their hands? When you flee away and wander you will bid them stand off and not touch you, because they are unclean. But in vain; these serpents will not be charmed or enchanted thus; no, they will not respect the persons of the priests, nor favour the elders; the most venerable persons will to them be despicable." 2. They upbraided them with their sins, and the anger of God against them for their sins, and the direful effects of that anger. *They cried to them, Depart you; it is unclean.* They all cried out shame on them, and could easily foresee that God would not long suffer so provoking a people to continue in so good a land. They knew their statutes and judgments were righteous, and expected they should be a wise and understanding people, Deut. iv. 6. But, when they saw them quite otherwise, they cried, *Depart, depart*; they soon read their doom, that the land would spue them out, as it had done their predecessors, and, when they saw the dispersed of Jacob fleeing and wandering, they told them of it. They said, Now the anger of the Lord has divided them, has dispersed them into all countries, because they respected not the persons of the priests, the pious priests that were among them, such as Zechariah the son of Jehoiada, Jeremiah, and others; neither did they favour the elders, but despised them and their authority when they went about to check them for their vicious courses. The very heathen foresaw that this would ruin them. 3. They triumphed in their ruin as irrecoverable. They said, when they saw them expelled out of their own land, "*Now they shall no more sojourn there*; they have bidden it a final farewell, never more to return to it, for God will no more regard them, and how then can they help themselves?" Herein they were mistaken. God had not cast them off, for all this. Yet thus much is intimated, that all about them observed them to be so very provoking to their God that there was no reason to expect any other than that they should be quite abandoned.

III. The despair which they themselves were almost brought to under their calamities. Having heard what they said concerning them *among the heathen*, let us now hear what they say concerning themselves (v. 17): "*As for us*, we look upon our case to be in a manner helpless. *Our end is near* (v. 18), the end both of our church and of our state; we are just at the brink of the ruin of both; nay, *our end has come*; we are utterly undone; a fatal final period is put to all our comforts; the days of our prosperity are fulfilled; they are numbered and finished."



Thus their fears concurred with the hopes of their enemies that the Lord would no more regard them. For, 1. The refugees they fled to disappointed them. They looked for help from this and the other powerful ally, but to no purpose; it proved vain help. The succours they expected did not come in, or at least they had not the success they expected, and their eyes failed with looking for that which never came (v. 17); they watched in watching; they watched long, and with a great deal of earnestness and impatience, for a nation that promised them assistance, but failed them, and frustrated their expectations. They could not save them; they were too weak to contend with the Chaldean army and therefore retired. Help from creatures is vain help (Ps. lx. 11), and we may look for it till our eyes fail, till our hearts fail, and come short of it at last. 2. The persecutors they fled from overtook them and overcame them (v. 18): *They hunt our steps, that we cannot go in our streets.* When the Chaldeans besieged the city they raised their batteries so high above the walls that they could command the town, and shoot at people as they went along the streets. *They hunted them with their arrows from place to place.* When the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled, their persecutors were swifter than the eagles of heaven when they fly upon their prey, v. 19. There was no escaping them; they pursued them upon the mountains, and, when they thought they had got clear of them, they fell into the hands of those that laid wait for them in the wilderness, to cut off their retreat, and to pick up stragglers. Nay, the king himself, though he may be supposed to have had all the advantages the exigence of the case would admit to favour his flight, yet could not escape, for divine vengeance pursued him with them, and then (v. 20), *The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, was taken in their pits.* Some apply it to Josiah, who was killed in battle by the king of Egypt; but it is rather to be understood of Zedekiah, who was the last king of the house of David, and who was pursued by the Chaldeans and seized in the plains of Jericho, Jer. xxxix. 5. He was the anointed of the Lord, heir of that family which God had appointed to the government. He was very much confided in by the Jewish state: *They said, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen.* They promised themselves that the remnant which were left after Jeconiah's captivity should, under the protection of his government, yet again take root downward and bear fruit upward. They thought, though they were so reduced that they could not think of reigning over the heathen, as they had done, yet they might make a shift to live among them and not be insulted and pulled to pieces by them. Thus our are sinking interests not only to catch at

every twig, but to think it will recover them. Jerusalem died of a consumption, a flattering distemper. Even when she was ready to expire she formed some hopeful symptoms to herself, and on them grounded a hope that she should recover; but what came of it? The shadow under which they thought they should live proved like that of Jonah's gourd, which withered in a night. He that was the anointed of the Lord was taken in their pits, as if he had been but a beast of prey; so little account did they make of a person deemed sacred and not to be violated. Note, When we make any creature the breath of our nostrils, and promise ourselves that we shall live by it, it is just with God to stop that breath, and deprive us of the life we expected by it; for God will have the honour of being himself alone our life and the length of our days.

21 Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, that dwellest in the land of Uz; the cup also shall pass through unto thee: thou shalt be drunken, and shalt make thyself naked. 22 The punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion; he will no more carry thee away into captivity: he will visit thine iniquity, O daughter of Edom; he will discover thy sins.

David's psalms of lamentation commonly conclude with some word of comfort, which is as life from the dead and light shining out of darkness; so does this lamentation here in this chapter. The people of God are now in great distress, their aspects all doleful, their prospects all frightful, and their ill-natured neighbours the Edomites insult over them and do all they can to exasperate their destroyers against them. Such was their violence against their brother Jacob (Obad. 10), such their spleen at Jerusalem, of which they cried, *Raze it, raze it*, Pa. cxxxvii. 7. Now it is here foretold, for the encouragement of God's people,

1. That an end shall be put to Zion's troubles (v. 22): *The punishment of thy iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion!* not the fulness of that punishment which it deserves, but of that which God has designed and determined to inflict, and which was necessary to answer the end, the glorifying of God's justice and the taking away of their sin. The captivity, which is the punishment of thy iniquity, is accomplished (Isa. xl. 3), and he will no longer keep thee in captivity; so it may be read, as well as, *he will no more carry thee into captivity*: he will turn again thy captivity and work a glorious release for thee. Note, The troubles of God's people shall be continued no longer than till they have done their work for which they were sent.

II. That an end shall be put to Edom's triumphs. It is spoken ironically (v. 21): *Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom! go on to insult over Zion in distress, till thou hast filled up the measure of thy iniquity. Do so; rejoice in thy own present exemption from the common fate of thy neighbours.*" This is like Solomon's upbraiding the young man with his ungoverned mirth (Eccl. xi. 9): "*Rejoice, O young man! in thy youth; rejoice, if thou canst, when God comes to reckon with thee, and that he will do ere long. The cup of trembling, which it is now Jerusalem's turn to drink deeply of, shall pass through unto thee; it shall go round till it comes to be thy lot to pledge it.*" Note, This is a good reason why we should not insult over any who are in misery, because we ourselves also are in the body, and we know not how soon their case may be ours. But those who please themselves in the calamities of God's church must expect to have their doom, as aiders and abettors, with those that are instrumental in those calamities. The destruction of the Edomites was foretold by this prophet (Jer. xlix. 7. &c.), and the people of God must encourage themselves against their present rudeness and insolence with the prospect of it. 1. It will be a shameful destruction: "*The cup that shall pass unto thee shall intoxicate thee*" (and that is shame enough to any man); "*thou shalt be drunken*, quite infatuated, and at thy wits' end, shalt stagger in all thy counsels and stumble in all thy enterprises, and then, as Noah when he was drunk, *thou shalt make thyself naked* and expose thyself to contempt." Note, Those who ridicule God's people will justly be left to themselves to do that, some time or other, by which they will be made ridiculous. 2. It will be a righteous destruction. God will herein *visit thy iniquity and discover thy sins*; he will punish them, and, to justify himself therein, he will discover them, and make it to appear that he has just cause thus to proceed against them. Nay, the punishment of the sin shall so exactly answer the sin that it shall itself plainly discover it. Sometimes God does so visit the iniquity that he that runs may read the sin in the punishment. But, sooner or later, sin will be visited and discovered, and all the hidden works of darkness brought to light.

## CHAP. V.

This chapter, though it has the same number of verses with the 1st, 2d, and 4th, is not alphabetical, as they were, but the scope of it is the same with that of all the foregoing elegies. We have in it, I. A representation of the present calamitous state of God's people in their captivity, ver. 1-16. II. A protestation of their concern for God's sanctuary, as that which lay nearer their heart than any secular interest of their own, ver. 17, 18. III. A humble supplication to God and expostulation with him, for the returns of mercy (ver. 19-22); for those that lament and do not pray sin in their lamentations. Some ancient versions call this chapter, "The Prayer of Jeremiah."

**R**EMEMBER, O LORD, what is come upon us: consider, and

behold our reproach. 2 Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens. 3 We are orphans and fatherless, our mothers *are* as widows. 4 We have drunken our water for money; our wood is sold unto us. 5 Our necks *are* under persecution: we labour, *and* have no rest. 6 We have given the hand to the Egyptians, *and* to the Assyrians, to be satisfied with bread. 7 Our fathers have sinned, *and are* not; and we have borne their iniquities. 8 Servants have ruled over us: *there is* none that doth deliver *us* out of their hand. 9 We gat our bread with the *peril* of our lives because of the sword of the wilderness. 10 Our skin was black like an oven because of the terrible famine. 11 They ravished the women in Zion, *and* the maids in the cities of Judah. 12 Princes are hanged up by their hand: the faces of elders were not honoured. 13 They took the young men to grind, and the children fell under the wood. 14 The elders have ceased from the gate, the young men from their musick. 15 The joy of our heart is ceased; our dance is turned into mourning. 16 The crown is fallen *from* our head: woe unto us, that we have sinned!

*Is any afflicted? let him pray;* and let him in prayer pour out his complaint to God, and make known before him his trouble. The people of God do so here; being overwhelmed with grief, they give vent to their sorrows at the footstool of the throne of grace, and so give themselves ease. They complain not of evils feared, but of evils felt: "*Remember what has come upon us, v. 1. What was of old threatened against us, and was long in the coming, has now at length come upon us, and we are ready to sink under it. Remember what is past, consider and behold what is present, and let not all the trouble we are in seem little to thee, and not worth taking notice of,*" Neh. ix. 32. Note, As it is a great comfort to us, so it ought to be a sufficient one, in our troubles, that God sees, and considers, and remembers, all that *has come upon us*; and in our prayers we need only to recommend our case to his gracious and compassionate consideration. The one word in which all their grievances are summed up is *reproach*: *Consider, and behold, our reproach.* The troubles they were in, compared with their former dignity and plenty, were a greater reproach to them than they would have been



to any other people, especially considering their relation to God and dependence upon him, and his former appearances for them; and therefore this they complain of very sensibly, because, as it was a reproach, it reflected upon the name and honour of that God who had owned them for his people. *And what wilt thou do unto thy great name?*

I. They acknowledge the reproach of sin which they bear, the reproach of their youth (which Ephraim bemoans himself for, Jer. xxxi. 19), of the early days of their nation. This comes in in the midst of their complaints (v. 7), but may well be put in the front of them: *Our fathers have sinned and are not; they are dead and gone, but we have borne their iniquities.* This is not here a peevish complaint, nor an imputation of unrighteousness to God, like that which we have, Jer. xxxi. 29, Ezek. xviii. 2. *The fathers did eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge, and therefore the ways of the Lord are not equal.* But it is a penitent confession of the sins of their ancestors, which they themselves also had persisted in, for which they now justly suffered; the judgments God brought upon them were so very great that it appeared that God had in them an eye to the sins of their ancestors (because they had not been remarkably punished in this world) as well as to their own sins; and thus God was justified both in his connivance at their ancestors (he laid up their iniquity for their children) and in his severity with them, on whom he visited that iniquity, Matt. xxiii. 35, 36. Thus they do here, 1. Submit themselves to the divine justice: "Lord, thou art just in all that is brought upon us, for we are a seed of evil doers, children of wrath, and heirs of the curse; we are sinful, and we have it by kind." Note, The sins which God looks back upon in punishing we must look back upon in repenting, and must take notice of all that which will help to justify God in correcting us. 2. They refer themselves to the divine pity: "Lord, our fathers have sinned, and we justly smart for their sins; but they are not; they were taken away from the evil to come; they lived not to see and share in these miseries that have come upon us, and we are left to bear their iniquities. Now, though herein God is righteous, yet it must be owned that our case is pitiable, and worthy of compassion." Note, If we be penitent and patient under what we suffer for the sins of our fathers, we may expect that he who punishes will pity, and will soon return in mercy to us.

II. They represent the reproach of trouble which they bear, in divers particulars, which tend much to their disgrace.

1. They are dispossessed of that good land which God gave them, and their enemies have got possession of it, v. 2. Canaan was their inheritance: it was theirs by promise. God gave it to them and their seed, and they held it by grant from his crown, Ps.

exxxvi. 21, 22; but now, "It is turned to strangers; those possess it who have no right to it, who are strangers to the commonwealth of Israel and aliens from the covenants of promise; they dwell in the houses that we built, and this is our reproach." It is the happiness of all God's spiritual Israel that the heavenly Canaan is an inheritance that they cannot be dispossessed of, that shall never be turned to strangers.

2. Their state and nation are brought into a condition like that of widows and orphans (v. 3): "We are fatherless (that is, helpless); we have none to protect us, to provide for us, to take any care of us. Our king, who is the father of the country, is cast off; nay, God our Father seems to have forsaken us and cast us off; our mothers, our cities, that were as fruitful mothers in Israel, are now as widows, are as wives whose husbands are dead, destitute of comfort, and exposed to wrong and injury, and this is our reproach; for we who made a figure are now looked on with contempt."

3. They are put hard to it to provide necessaries for themselves and their families, whereas once they lived in abundance and had plenty of every thing. Water used to be free and easily come by, but now (v. 4), *We have drunk our water for money, and the saying is no longer true, Unus aquarum—Water is free to all.* So hardly did their oppressors use them that they could not have a draught of fair water but they must purchase it either with money or with work. Formerly they had fuel too for the fetching; but now, "Our wood is sold to us, and we pay dearly for every faggot." Now were they punished for employing their children to gather wood for fire with which to bake cakes for the queen of heaven, Jer. vii. 18. They were perfectly prohibited by their oppressors, were forbidden the use both of fire and water, according to the ancient form, *Interdico tibi opus et ignem—I forbid thee the use of water and fire.* But what must they do for bread? Truly that was as hard to come at as any thing, for (1.) Some of them sold their liberty for it (v. 6): "We have given the land to the Egyptians and to the Assyrians, have made the best bargain we could with them, to serve them, that we might be satisfied with bread. We were glad to submit to the meanest employment, upon the hardest terms, to get a sorry livelihood; we have yielded ourselves to be their vassals, have parted with all to them, as the Egyptians did to Pharaoh in the years of famine, that we might have something for ourselves and families to subsist on." The neighbouring nations used to trade with Judah for wheat (Ezek. xlvi. 17), for it was a fruitful land; but now it costs up the inhabitants, and they are glad to trade with the Egyptians and Assyrians. (2.) Others of them ventured their lives for it (v. 9): *We got our bread with the peril of our lives.*

when, being straitened by the siege and all provisions cut off, they either sallied or stole out of the city, to fetch in some supply, they were in danger of falling into the hands of the besiegers and being put to the sword, *the sword of the wilderness* it is called, or *of the plain* (for so the word signifies), the besiegers lying dispersed every where in the plains that were about the city. Let us take occasion hence to bless God for the plenty that we enjoy, that we get our bread so easily, scarcely with the sweat of our face, much less *with the peril of our lives*; and for the peace we enjoy, that we can go out, and enjoy not only the necessary productions, but the pleasures of the country, without any fear of *the sword of the wilderness*.

4. Those are brought into slavery who were a free people, and not only their own masters, but masters of all about them, and this is as much as any thing their reproach (v. 5): *Our necks are under the grievous and intolerable yoke of persecution* (the iron yoke which Jeremiah foretold should be laid upon them, Jer. xxviii. 14); we are used like beasts in the yoke, that wholly serve their owners, and are at the command of their drivers. That which aggravated the servitude was, (1.) That their labours were incessant, like those of Israel in Egypt, who were daily tasked, nay, overtasked: *We labour and have no rest*, neither leave nor leisure to rest. The oxen in the yoke are unyoked at night and have rest; so they have, by a particular provision of the law, on the sabbath day; but the poor captives in Babylon, who were compelled to work for their living, *laboured and had no rest*, no night's rest, no sabbath-rest; they were quite tired out with continual toil. (2.) That their masters were insufferable (v. 8): *Servants have ruled over us*; and nothing is more vexatious than a *servant when he reigns*, Prov. xxx. 22. They were not only the great men of the Chaldeans that commanded them, but even the meanest of their servants abused them at pleasure, and insulted over them; and they must be at their beck too. The curse of Canaan had now become the doom of Judah: *A servant of servants shall he be*. They would not be ruled by their God, and by his servants the prophets, whose rule was gentle and gracious, and therefore justly are they ruled with rigour by their enemies and their servants. (3.) That they saw no probable way for the redress of their grievances: "*There is none that doth deliver us out of their hand*; not only none to rescue us out of our captivity, but none to check and restrain the insolence of the servants that abuse us and trample upon us," which one would think their masters should have done, because it was a usurpation of their authority; but, it should seem, they connived at it and encouraged it, and, as if they were not worthy of the correction of gentlemen, they are turned

over to the footmen to be spurned by them. Well might they pray, *Lord, consider and behold our reproach*.

5. Those who used to be feasted are now famished (v. 10): *Our skin was black like an oven, dried and parched too, because of the terrible famine, the storms of famine* (so the word is); for, though famine comes gradually upon a people, yet it comes violently, and bears down all before it, and there is no resisting it; and this also is their disgrace; hence we read of *the reproach of famine*, which in captivity they received among the heathen, Ezek. xxxvi. 30.

6. All sorts of people, even those whose persons and characters were most inviolable, were abused and dishonoured. (1.) *The women were ravished, even the women in Zion*, that holy mountain, v. 11. The committing of such abominable wickednesses there is very justly and sadly complained of. (2.) The great men were not only put to death, but put to ignominious deaths. *Princes were hanged*, as if they had been slaves, *by the hands of the Chaldeans* (v. 12), who took a pride in doing this barbarous execution with *their own hands*. Some think that the dead bodies of the princes, after they were slain with the sword, were hung up, as the bodies of Saul's sons, in disgrace to them, and as it were to expiate the nation's guilt. (3.) No respect was shown to magistrates and those in authority: *The faces of elders, elders in age, elders in office, were not honoured*. This will be particularly remembered against the Chaldeans another day. Isa. xlvii. 6, *Upon the ancient hast thou very heavily laid thy yoke*. (4.) The tenderness of youth was no more considered than the gravity of old age (v. 13): *They took the young men to grind at the hand-mills, nay, perhaps at the horse-mills. The young men have carried the grist* (so some), *have carried the mill, or mill-stones*, so others. They loaded them as if they had been beasts of burden, and so broke their backs when they were young, and made the rest of their lives the more miserable. Nay, they made the little children carry their wood home for fuel, and laid such burdens upon them that they fell down under them, so very inhuman were these cruel taskmasters!

7. An end was put to all their gladness, and then joy was quite extinguished (v. 14): *The young men, who used to be disposed to mirth, have ceased from their music*, have hung their harps upon the willow-trees. It does indeed well become old men to cease from their music; it is time to lay it by with a gracious contempt when *all the daughters of music are brought low*; but it speaks some great calamity upon a people when their young men are made to cease from it. It was so with the body of the people (v. 15): *The joy of their heart ceased*; they never knew what joy was since the enemy came in upon them like a flood, for ever since



deep called unto deep, and one wave flowed in upon the neck of another, so that they were quite overwhelmed: *Our dance is turned into mourning*, instead of leaping for joy, as formerly, we sink and lie down in sorrow. This may refer especially to the joy of their solemn feasts, and the dancing used in them (Judg. xxi. 21), which was not only modest, but sacred, dancing; this was *turned into mourning*, which was doubled on their festival days, in remembrance of their former pleasant things.

8. An end was put to all their glory. (1.) The public administration of justice was their glory, but that was gone: *The elders have ceased from the gate* (v. 14); the course of justice, which used to run down like a river, is now stopped; the courts of justice, which used to be kept with so much solemnity, are put down; for the judges are slain, or carried captive. (2.) The royal dignity was their glory, but that also was gone: *The crown has fallen from our head*, not only the king himself fallen into disgrace, but *the crown*; he has no successor; the regalia are all lost. Note, Earthly crowns are fading falling things; but, blessed be God, there is a *crown of glory that fades not away*, that never falls, a *kingdom that cannot be moved*. Upon this complaint, but with reference to all the foregoing complaints, they make that penitent acknowledgment, "*Woe unto us that we have sinned!*" Alas for us! Our case is very deplorable, and it is all owing to ourselves; we are undone, and, which aggravates the matter, we are undone by our own hands. God is righteous, for *we have sinned*." Note, All our woes are owing to our own sin and folly. If *the crown of our head be fallen* (for so the words run), if we lose our excellency and become mean, we may thank ourselves, we have by our own iniquity profaned our crown and *laid our honour in the dust*.

17 For this our heart is faint; for these *things* our eyes are dim. 18 Because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it. 19 Thou, O LORD, remainest for ever; thy throne from generation to generation. 20 Wherefore dost thou forget us for ever, and forsake us so long time? 21 Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old. 22 But thou hast utterly rejected us; thou art very wroth against us.

Here, I. The people of God express the deep concern they had for the ruins of the temple, more than for any other of their calamities; the interests of God's house lay nearer their hearts than those of their own (v. 17, 18): *For this our heart is faint*, and sinks under the load of its own heaviness;

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for these *things* our eyes are dim, and our sight is gone, as is usual in a deliquium, or fainting fit. "It is because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the holy mountain, and the temple built upon that mountain. For other desolations our hearts grieve and our eyes weep; but for this our hearts faint and our eyes are dim." Note, Nothing lies so heavily upon the spirits of good people as that which threatens the ruin of religion or weakens its interests; and it is a comfort if we can appeal to God that that afflicts us more than any temporal affliction to ourselves. "The people have polluted the mountain of Zion with their sins, and therefore God has justly made it desolate, to such a degree that the foxes walk upon it as freely and commonly as they do in the woods." It is sad indeed when the mountain of Zion has become a *portion for foxes* (Ps. lxxiii. 10); but sin had first made it so, Ezek. xiii. 4.

II. They comfort themselves with the doctrine of God's eternity, and the perpetuity of his government (v. 19): *But thou, O Lord! remainest for ever*. This they are taught to do by that psalm which is entitled, *A prayer of the afflicted*, Ps. cii. 27, 28. When all our creature-comforts are removed from us, and our hearts fail us, we may then encourage ourselves with the belief, 1. Of God's eternity: *Thou remainest for ever*. What shakes the world gives no disturbance to him who made it; whatever revolutions there are on earth there is no change in the Eternal Mind; God is still the same, and *remains for ever* infinitely wise and holy, just and good; with him there is *no variableness nor shadow of turning*. 2. Of the never-failing continuance of his dominion: *Thy throne is from generation to generation*; the throne of glory, the throne of grace, and the throne of government, are all unchangeable, immovable; and this is matter of comfort to us when *the crown has fallen from our head*. When the thrones of princes, that should be our protectors, are brought to the dust, and buried in it, God's throne continues still; he still rules the world, and rules it for the good of the church. The Lord reigns, reigns for ever, even *thy God, O Zion!*

III. They humbly expostulate with God concerning the low condition they were now in, and the frowns of heaven they were now under (v. 20): "*Wherefore dost thou forget us for ever*, as if we were quite cast out of mind? *Wherefore dost thou forsake us so long time*, as if we were quite deprived of the tokens of thy presence? *Wherefore dost thou defer our deliverance*, as if thou hadst utterly abandoned us? *Thou art the same*, and, though the throne of thy sanctuary is demolished, thy throne in heaven is unshaken. But wilt thou not be the same to us?" Not as if they thought God had forgotten and forsaken them, much less feared his forgetting and forsaking them for ever; but thus they express the value

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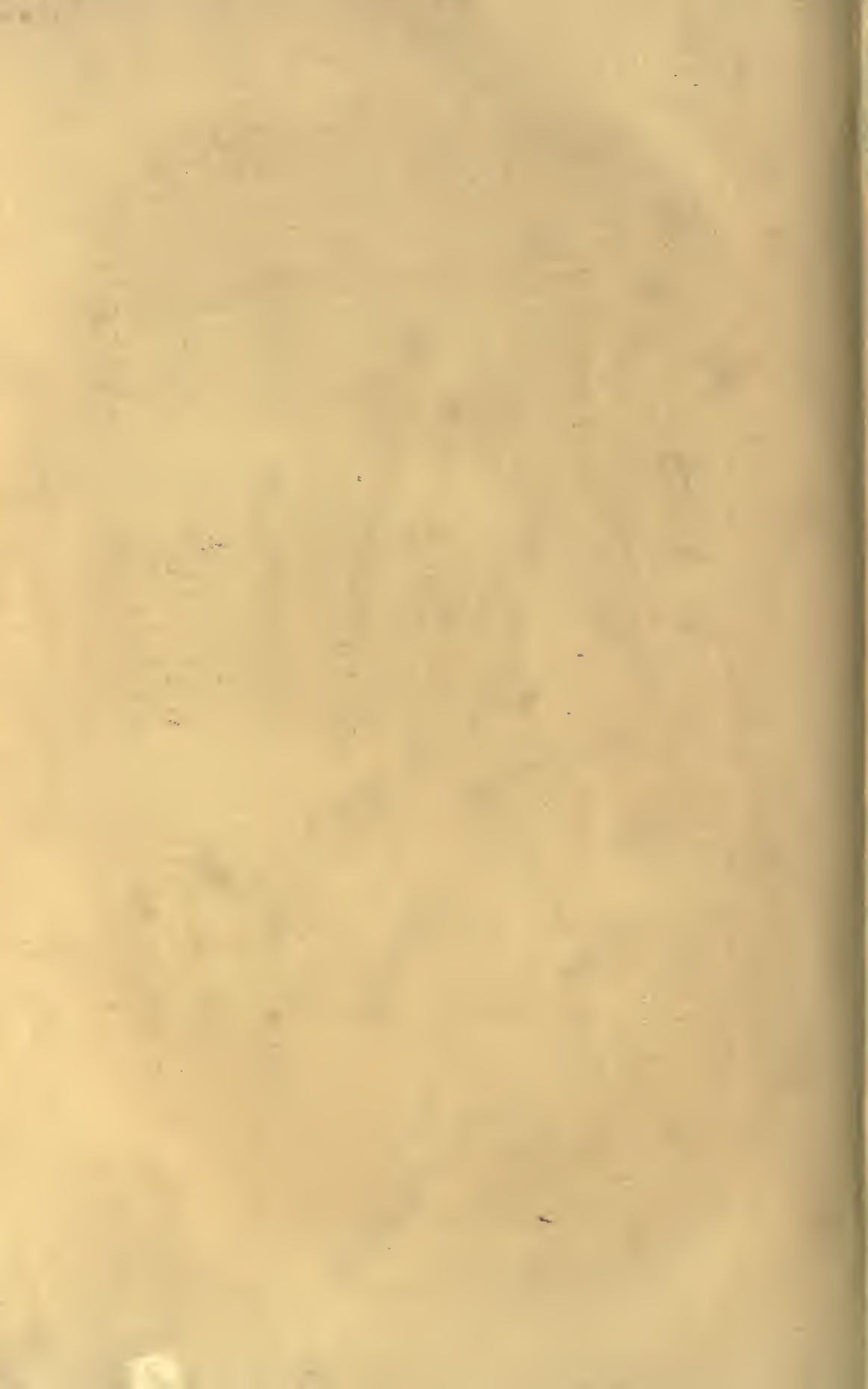
they had for his favour and presence, which they thought it long that they were deprived of the evidence and comfort of. The last verse may be read as such an expostulation, and so the margin reads it: "*For wilt thou utterly reject us? Wilt thou be perpetually wroth with us, not only not smile upon us and remember us in mercy, but frown upon us and lay us under the tokens of thy wrath, not only not draw nigh to us, but cast us out of thy presence and forbid us to draw nigh unto thee? How will this be reconciled with thy goodness and faithfulness, and the stability of thy covenant?*" We read it, "*But thou hast rejected us; thou hast given us cause to fear that thou hast. Lord, how long shall we be in this temptation?*" Note, Though we may not quarrel with God, yet we may plead with him; and, though we may not conclude that he has cast off, yet we may (with the prophet, Jer. xii. 1) humbly reason with him concerning his judgments, especially the continuance of the desolations of his sanctuary.

IV. They earnestly pray to God for mercy and grace: "*Lord, do not reject us for ever, but turn thou us unto thee; renew our days,*" v. 21. Though these words are not put last, yet the Rabbin, because they would not have the book to conclude with those melancholy words (v. 22), repeat this prayer again, that the sun may not set under a cloud, and so make these the last words both in writing and reading this chapter. They here pray, 1. For converting grace to prepare and qualify them for mercy: *Turn us to thee, O Lord!* They had complained that God had forsaken and forgotten them, and then their prayer is not, *Turn thou to us*, but, *Turn us to thee*, which implies an acknowledgment that the cause of the dis-

tance was in themselves. God never leaves any till they first leave him, nor stands afar off from any longer than while they stand afar off from him; if therefore he turn them: to him in a way of duty, no doubt but he will quickly return to them in a way of mercy. This agrees with that repeated prayer (Ps. lxxx. 3, 7, 19), *Turn us again, and then cause thy face to shine. Turn us from our idols to thyself, by a sincere repentance and reformation, and then we shall be turned.* This implies a further acknowledgment of their own weakness and inability to turn themselves. There is in our nature a proneness to backslide from God, but no disposition to return to him till his grace works in us both *to will and to do*. So necessary is that grace that we may truly say, *Turn us or we shall not be turned*, but shall wander endlessly; and so powerful and effectual is that grace that we may as truly say, *Turn us, and we shall be turned*; for it is a day of power, almighty power, in which God's people are made a *willing people*, Ps. cx. 3. 2. For restoring mercy: *Turn us to thee*, and then *renew our days as of old*, put us into the same happy state that our ancestors were in long ago and that they continued long in; let it be with us as it was at *the first, and at the beginning*, Isa. i. 26. Note, If God by his grace renew our hearts, he will by his favour *renew our days*, so that we shall *renew our youth as the eagle*, Ps. ciii. 5. Those that *repent, and do their first works*, shall rejoice, and recover their first comforts. God's mercies to his people have been *ever of old* (Ps. xxv. 6); and therefore they may hope, even then when he seems to have forsaken and forgotten them, that the mercy which was *from everlasting* will be *to everlasting*.









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